

AUGUST 1924

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SMART SET



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The Eternal Huntress



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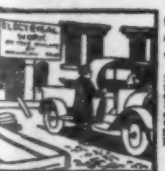
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SMART SET

In this issue

A Brilliant Serial

The Eternal Huntress by Rayner Seelig 7

Stirred by a force beyond her control, Isabel Rayburn obeyed the oldest impulse known to woman! It was the "Red Magic of Love" that urged her . . .

A Complete Novelette

Take and Pay by Virginia Kline 75

The grim motto—"Take and Pay"—was to have a severe testing. . . It had served Brett Wills, millionaire, for years, and he turned to it in his crisis. . .

12 Short Stories

Guaranteed Not to Marry by Viola Burhans 27

The Other Side of the Story . . . by Frederic Arnold Kummer 39

Pamela's Pajamas by Wilson Collison 49

Sextette by Watkins Eppes Wright 63

Sentence of Death by Gladys St. John-Loe . . . 65

Slim Lady by Nancy Hoyt 108

The Radio Riddle by Arthur B. Reeve 113

Ashes by Christine Dale 127

The Merry Magdalena by David Karsner 131

The By-Path by Dana Gatlin 140

An Evening Out by Charles G. Shaw 153

A Kiss in the Dark by Nan O'Reilly 157

A Dozen Scintillating Short Sketches

by Jay Jarrod, Warren Spencer, Reggie Van Lord, George B. Jenkins, Jr., Louise de Salis, Jean Rolfe, and others.

Poems by Berton Braley, Mary Carolyn Davies, William A. Drake, Eleanor De Lamater, William Troy, Elizabeth Shaw Montgomery.

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No. 4

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Should a bride tell her husband what happened at seventeen?

Will you be able to hold the love of the one you cherish—or will your marriage end in divorce?

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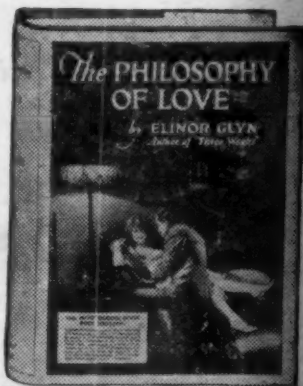
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August

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11

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THE BORDER LINE

to the

September Smart Set

It is a curious story of the mysterious power her first husband—dead—exerts over a woman who has married again. . . It might be called a ghost story, if it wasn't so true to life. No other writer understands the relations of men and women—in love or hatred, in calm or violence—so clearly and yet so subtly as D. H. Lawrence. "The Border Line" is one of his most convincing and emotional stories. It is complete in the September issue.



Among the other famous authors contributing short stories to the September issue are Albert Payson Terhune, Jack Boyle and Arthur B. Reeve. In the number also is a typical SMART SET novelette and the second installment of Miss Seelig's brilliant novel, *The Eternal Huntress*.

SMART SET

All on a Summer's Night

By Charles G. Shaw

THE pale, dappled moon hung low in the star-laced sky, and the soft, salt breeze wafted through the scented, sunken garden. Dimly, from within, came the strain of a lazy fox-trot.

"I know," wearily sighed the jaded little debutante, sipping a tall Scotch highball, "you are going to tell me again how much you love me."

* * * * *

As the great liner, *Luxuria* plowed through the crashing billows, an over-rouged, under-dressed female reclined in a steamer-chair on Deck B, puffing a gold-tipped cigarette.

"Yes," she yawned, "divorce is certainly a bore. But, then, it's all so easily arranged in Paris."

* * * * *

In the back room of a bleak, tumble-down tenement, an emaciated little girl in tattered calico sat dreaming, a smile of rapture on her pallid face. Fallen to the floor, at her feet, lay the story of Cinderella.



YOU can judge a woman's past by the way she holds her cigarettes, and her future by the way she holds her drinks.



In the Grill

By John Torcross

"JUST a bite for me. Some oysters and soup; a little fish and chicken with salad and coffee. . . . Will you *please* look who's with Kitty Fluffington! . . . I wish you'd ask them to play that song from the Follies. . . . I can't imagine what he sees in her, and they're always together. . . . Of course she invited me, but I told her I couldn't go. . . . Pour it out, now. No one can see. . . . Yes, put plenty of salt on it. . . . Why, she looks ten years older than she did last winter. . . . This is really breakfast for me, you know. . . . I know his face perfectly, but I can never remember names. . . . Don't look now; they're both talking about us. . . . I *do* wish that man in the blue collar would stop staring at me. . . . No, I never touch butter. . . . Yes, let's get the check. Will you excuse me a minute while I phone?"



One, Lonely, Sings

By Mary Carolyn Davies

THE cedars on the lawn
The slow day's shadows mark;
At dawn
Birds break the dark.

But you walk down no more
To the small house, the tree,
The rose, beside the door,
That has no bee.



The Circle

By Louise de Salis

WHEN a woman is single, she dreams of what she would do if she were married.

When she is married, she plans what she would accomplish if she were a widow.

When she becomes a widow, she draws mental diagrams of the improvements she will make when she marries again.



She wanted him—more than anything else on earth! Woman-like, she tried to conceal her love—but she was driven by a force stronger than civilization. . . . So, under the sparkling veneer of smart New York, the old primitive struggle went on. . . . “The Red Magic of Love,” her bitter, invalid father called it—and what Isabel did may seem ruthless, mad, frenzied—but women will understand!



The Eternal Huntress

By Rayner Seelig

Chapter One

IT was one o'clock on a Saturday in December, 1921.

In the Ritz grill Theodore assigned tables with affable diplomacy. Through a cacophony of voices and laughter sounded the “March of the Wooden Soldiers” from Balieff’s “Chauve-Souris.” The air was redolent of perfume and dying orchids; dim with the smoke of cigarettes; aquiver

with the disease of post-war affluence: the fear of missing some secret delight which life might hold in store. The struggle for money was succeeded by the struggle for spontaneity.

At a table near the door three girls studied the *carte du jour*.

“I think,” said Susie Burnham, most conspicuous of the group, “I really think—that I shall have sweetbreads in cream.”

Cecil Rayburn, the young woman

with straight tan hair coiled above a neck from which the summer sunburn would never quite depart, followed with a definite, "Turkey hash for me."

Whereupon Susie, especially susceptible to the fear of missing something, chimed in: "Then so will I. Make it three, Isabel?"

Cecil Rayburn's nineteen-year-old sister instructed the waiter to bring hash for two and sweetbreads for one, at which Susie's piercing soprano protested:

"You might have waited, Isabel. I'm sure the sweetbreads are—"

"Then you shall have mine." Isabel knew from long experience the most effective way to deal with Susie.

MEANWHILE Cecil extracted a cigarette from a paper package, and began to smoke in a business-like manner. She gave, from the tips of her brown oxfords to the lapelled collar of her coat, two dominant impressions: health and efficiency. Facts—even unpleasant ones—held no terrors for her. Inclined to be neither nervous nor highly impressionable, Cecil Rayburn was all but immune to the psychic and social upheavals of the era in which she lived. She looked with solicitude upon the successive surrenders of her less positive sister.

Isabel, in fact, had not escaped the combined influences of her emancipated contemporaries. Under their tutelage she had come to regard herself as a prospective citizen rather than a prospective mother, to refer to her occupation—sculpture—as a career instead of a pastime, and to regard her first love affair, in which she was now completely immersed, as a problem rather than a diversion.

She had not, like many others, a background of solid tradition, or an image of the family-group to balance the scale. Her feelings for her father, Captain Rayburn, were quite untinted by respect. She had, actually, only two deep attachments. She loved her sister, who returned the affection in kind, and Richard du Maurier, who did not.

In this she differed essentially from Susie Burnham, whose personal relations were numerous and brief. Susie could treasure a jewel or a sweetheart of her own; but she generally preferred the possessions of her friends.

Thus, when the luncheon arrived, she confessed that neither turkey nor sweetbreads appealed to her, and the waiter was dispatched to ascertain the health and status of shell-fish in December.

Just at this moment Isabel gave a little gasp. "Dick!" she cried. "I didn't know he was back from Hot Springs."

"What? Who? Du Maurier?" exclaimed Susie. "Where is he?"

"Easy to pick him out by the halo," was Cecil's caustic contribution.

Isabel directed Susie's wandering gaze to a splendidly built man of about twenty-seven, with fair skin, thick brown hair, and features cast in a classical mould. He wore a gardenia in the buttonhole of his blue suit.

"That's Du Maurier," boasted Isabel, as he approached their table.

"Hello. I've been looking for you." He took Isabel's outstretched hand in his left, while he offered Cecil a more ceremonious clasp. "How's the market?"

Cecil—super-secretary to the senior partner of Harcourt, Hutchinson & Vincennes, a member of the New York Stock Exchange—replied briefly.

"Dick, this is Miss Burnham," said Isabel. "Susie—Du Maurier."

Du Maurier bowed and looked directly into Susie's round brown eyes. His stare was at once probing and humorous; against the immobility of his features his eyes were alive. They seemed to move, to pierce, to ferret out the secrets of the universe while keeping their own secrets inviolate.

"I got in this morning," he remarked, seating himself next to Isabel. "I thought I'd find you here."

Urged to have some lunch, it appeared he wanted nothing but a cigarette.

"Please, Mr. Du Maurier . . . try one of mine. They're Russian, the best

made, I think." And Susie opened a flat gold case, from which Du Maurier extracted one of the long yellow-tinted tubes.

The three girls hung upon his verdict, which he delivered by extinguishing Susie's contribution.

"But it's the most expensive kind you can get," defended Susie.

Du Maurier shrugged. "In the end the things we are used to are those to which we return. . . ."

"Haven't I seen you with the Biddles?" Susie's high-pitched insistence shattered his philosophic mood.

"Perhaps," he conceded, smoothing a frown of puzzled annoyance. "I've known Nero and Selina for years."

His glance swept briefly over the rings of Susie's plump fingers, the rouge on her full, rather sulky mouth, the smooth copper gloss of her hair. "Friends of yours?"

They were not. But Susie, who had recently packed up her mother and seventeen trunks, in order to move from a narrow house in Philadelphia to an apartment in the Park Avenue Fifties, replied artfully: "I used to see a lot of Nero's younger sister. We were practically neighbors in Philadelphia."

"Then you must know," started Du Maurier, and immediately the conversation became general, rapid. His apathy vanished as he talked. He had a way of making words seem vivid, almost human.

It developed that he had asked Isabel to dine with him that evening, and the suggestion that they invite Cecil, Stock Potter and Miss Burnham to a theatre party afterward brought forth a swift appeal from Susie.

"Oh, what am I to do?" she wailed. "I have an engagement with Bertie."

"Bring him along," Cecil commanded, amused at the prospect of seeing Bertram Wowse in juxtaposition with the immaculate Du Maurier. Bertie, stout, good-humored, irritatingly addicted to twisting words into unrecognizable grotesqueries, worshipped Susie, and through her had become acquainted with Stockbridge Potter, who was

known to almost everyone. But Bertie and Du Maurier, like Venus and Saturn, moved in different orbits.

CECIL, who had promised Mr. Harcourt to come back and type some important letters, finally arose, promising to call for the theatre tickets on her way downtown.

Du Maurier went next, anxious to round up Stock Potter, who would probably support a pillar in the Biltmore lobby until three o'clock, when he retired to a neighboring bar for the balance of the afternoon.

"I'll lead him back upon the path of righteousness," declared Du Maurier. And Isabel, chin resting on clasped hands, watched him until he disappeared.

The music had stopped; the tables emptied. Already the room was assuming that desolate air which crowds leave behind. Isabel longed for her own quiet bedroom, where she could ponder in solitude upon the blessings of love.

"Well, Susie, I'll see you later."

"Oh, but you mustn't go. I expect you to shop with me."

Isabel demurred. She had promised to go shopping on Thursday, and could not manage it before.

"I suppose I'll have to be lonely then. . . ." Susie's brown eyes filled with tears.

"Cheer up, old girl, we'll have a jolly evening," Isabel consoled her as they walked up the stairs. "And now I have to go. My father's all alone; the maid has gone to meet her cousin from Calais."

"But you said your father had a bell to the janitress's room. . . ." Susie still hoped to have her way.

"Still, either Cecil or I try to be there when Anastasie's out. It worries us, knowing how helpless he is." And Isabel, seeing her friend still unconvinced, brought forth the final argument: "I have to work on the 'Orpheus and Eurydice.' It's almost finished."

Susie, the injured angel, whispered huskily: "Of course, the work means more to you than I do. Here's Henry."

A handsome, low-swung cabriolet, agleam with nickel-plated finishings, drew up before the door. The chauffeur, ununiformed, incongruous against the sumptuous background, jumped off the box and stood at attention.

"I'd love to drive you down," Susie explained, the hint of reproof lingering in her voice as she trotted across the sidewalk, "only——"

The slamming door cut off her vague apologies.

"Poor kid," thought Isabel, with no more reason than her own excessive happiness. Then, tossing up her face to the December wind, she walked toward Fifth Avenue.



Chapter Two

THE apartment which the two sisters shared with their father, Captain Rayburn, was remote both in blocks and atmosphere from the populous garrulity of the Ritz. On the first story of an old-fashioned building in Washington Square West, it was built around a lofty studio-room, lighted from the north by a single window that reached from floor to ceiling. Beyond this chamber was another, opening upon a silent inner court paved in grey stone, and here, aloof from the eager life outside, Adrian Rayburn read, slept, drank highballs, and made ironic comments upon the world.

In 1897 Adrian Rayburn, still under twenty-five, was a living paradox. Blue-eyed, sweet-voiced, with the hands of an aesthete and the complexion of a girl, he had behind him the record of three voyages: one of exploration, in Brazil, and two hunting-trips, from which he returned with a little tan and a lot of leopard skins. These, in spite of his daughters' protests, were spread on the floor of his bedroom, and he often remarked: "A leopard did for me. I like to remember how many leopards I did for first."

Felix Carter, the brawny-armed ex-

plorer with whom he traveled in those days, gave Adrian Rayburn credit for more cold nerve than any living man, and used to refer to him jestingly as "the mailed fist in the velvet glove." His rare combination of sweetness and daring endeared the young Adrian to women. After his third trip he was presented to New York society by the charming Veronica French—who was widowed and white-haired though still under twenty—and he was promptly lionized. Toward the end of the season, just as he was making ready for a fourth journey, Mrs. French invited Adrian to meet her sister Helena, a quiet girl who had been brought up on a Connecticut farm, and seemed to have the perpetual freshness of young fruit about her.

ADRIAN and Helena were married in the spring; the explorer put aside his gun and took up gentlemanly farming. At the end of a glorious, secluded year on the bank of the wide river, Cecil was born. Then three years passed and, just as Adrian was beginning to feel the burden of the yoke of marriage, his second child arrived. He had hoped, after this, to move with his wife to New York, even to Paris, but the family doctor suddenly discovered that Helena's heart was weak; he advised her to stay on the farm, to live as tranquilly as possible. Helena accepted his verdict with characteristic forbearance. In moments of irritation, and especially now, Adrian identified her with a line of poetry he particularly detested. The one about "patience on a monument, smiling at grief." Certainly, from this date forward, time hung heavily upon young Captain Rayburn's unwillingly idle hands.

He never cared much for babies, but Cecil, who was already walking, talking and showing signs of her father's own stubbornness, he found charming. Still, though he loved to hear the infant call out "Adwian," and though he played with her for hours, she could not kill his rising boredom. And when, in 1907, shortly before Colonel Roosevelt's cele-

brated trip, Felix Carter begged Adrian to come with him to Africa, Adrian consented. He called upon his sister-in-law, Mrs. French, and begged her to break the news gently to Helena. Mrs. French, furious at the prospect, promptly refused. But Adrian left in spite of that, and for a year there was no word of him.

The word, when at last it came, was devastating. Captain Rayburn had gotten too close to a leopard, and when the rest of his party had reached the scene they had found nothing but scattered remnants of bloody clothing. Helena received the news with a deceptive appearance of calm. During the night that followed she had a severe heart attack, and for six months after she lay still, waxen white, without will to live. She died, patiently and unobtrusively as she had existed, in the bed where she had first consummated her marriage with Adrian Rayburn. She left her daughters comfortable incomes, and Veronica French was appointed executrix of the will.

Not long afterward all that was left of Adrian unexpectedly reappeared. Mrs. French was the first person to see him, but though his mutilated body hinted at the horror of those moments when the leopard clawed and dragged him, it won him little sympathy and no forgiveness. So Adrian never saw Mrs. French again.

FROM that time forward he severed relations with the community in which he lived. Cyril Harcourt, an old friend, handled his business affairs, but was never received by Adrian, who could not bear the thought of disclosing his ruined beauty, and had no desire to be pitied. With complete isolation as his aim, he remained at his wife's place in Connecticut until his daughters expressed an urgent wish to move to the city. In granting their desire he insisted upon the Washington Square district, which would keep him far from the scene of his former triumphs. Bitter, walled in with reserve, he clung to the solitude of his own apartment.

Cecil, always independent and undemonstrative, had already taken a position in Cyril Harcourt's office. And when Isabel returned from the boarding-school where she had learned to pour tea, write an illegible hand, and model figures in plastelline, Adrian encouraged her to continue the last occupation. He never interfered with his children's activities on condition that they left him alone; alone with his indomitable pride, his wrecked body, and his inverted vanity.

TWO of the French windows facing the court had been opened. Before leaving to meet her cousin from Calais, Anastasie had wheeled Captain Rayburn into the sunlight, and wrapped him in a wooly plaid which muffled the rather wayward outline of his figure. Above a scarf of fine yellow silk Adrian's head emerged like a jack-in-the-box. It was, as it had never been before, an impressive head, surmounted by a mop of upstanding hair which had retained its uncompromising blackness although the lustre was quite gone. In the light his ugliness was cruelly evident. The right side of his face, which he generally turned to the person with whom he was talking, was a mass of criss-cross seams, all of a uniform dull brown, so that it looked like a pie which the baker had left too long in the oven. The left side was marked, too, but slightly, the left eye still glittered with a keen, unsparing humor. His nose, gaunt and beaked, stood out imposingly, like some patrician tower erect in the midst of ruins. But alas for his once beautiful mouth, which smiled now, but on the left side only, and in a manner always sardonic, and often cruel. . . .

"I've been reading about dissected souls," Adrian told Isabel, as she came into his room. "Moreover, I find them less interesting, even less beautiful, than dissected bodies. These men are fools."

Isabel approached and picked up the dull blue book. At sight of the two names on the cover, her eyes assumed that expression of reverence which was

seemly. "Of course, papa," she protested, "you don't mean that."

Adrian growled: "What do they know of dreams, dream symbolism? There was a witch doctor in a place I once visited—he was old and fat and looked like a yellow hippopotamus—who knew more than they can imagine. And he was a savage."

Isabel sat down on the floor beside her father, realizing that he was in a rarely communicative mood. She pointed out that he had always ranked savages above the so-called civilized races in matters of wisdom.

"Civilization," said Adrian with a sneer, "reminds me of Cecil studying arithmetic. As soon as she learned how to multiply, she forgot how to subtract. In civilized countries we are so walled in with artificial laws that we lose sight of the natural ones. Our women have learned how to divide, and forgotten how to multiply. We have lost faculties which still exist in the most primitive tribes."

"Such as . . . ?"

"Well . . . eating raw meat. And dreams. Your Freud unearths the past with the aid of dreams. But in the same way my witch doctor unveils the future."

"Isn't that rather . . . nonsensical, papa?"

Adrian twisted the left side of his mouth into a grin. "Nonsense, is it? I used to have a dream, long ago, about a white leopard . . ."

"Is there such a thing?"

Adrian ignored the question, and resumed: "Civilization is a name civilized people have invented for hypocrisy. Truth—if there is such a thing—certain beautiful facts about nature which are somewhat curious, are either completely hidden or hideously twisted." His smile deepened. "Like my face," he concluded amicably.

"Papa, I think you believe in magic. If you'd lived in the Middle Ages, you'd have been an alchemist."

"And burned at the stake, no doubt." With an easy movement Adrian tossed the book out into the stone-paved court,

and turned to his daughter. "Have you ever had a curious feeling, at once great and small, as though you were about to receive a great revelation?"

"Yes. Sometimes at the top of a mountain at sunrise; sometimes under the stars."

"But you don't believe in magic. Well, well, by God——" Adrian broke off the sentence. "There's magic in love," he said in a voice that made Isabel shiver a little. "And it isn't always white magic. Sometimes it's black, and still again it's red: red as the sunset on a summer night, or the blood of some brutal and beautiful human sacrifice."

He was silent for a moment. Then: "Has that chap—what's his name?—Du Maurier come back?"

Isabel nodded, wondering how he knew.

"By—let us say more magic." He gloated over her discomfiture before he queried: "You're bound to have the fellow, aren't you? Going to marry him?"

"He hasn't asked me yet, papa."

"If you want him," Adrian said, "you'll get him in time. All women do." He laughed, a short sharp note like two pieces of metal struck together. "But you may have to use magic; you may even have to make a human sacrifice. In the tribe I spoke of, they made a point of offering the fathers. It was a perfectly practical demonstration of 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' oddly applied. A father for a lover. Excellent plan."

"Horrible," said Isabel.

"If you think that, you aren't in love. There is only one thing more brutal than love itself: a woman whose hunting-instinct is aroused."

"You talk as though women did the hunting."

"They do. There's a lot of talk about girl's being misled, but it's you who do the seducing. You get your hearts set on some fellow with broad shoulders and a narrow income, and you don't let him alone until he's answered the purpose of this nymphomaniac called Nature; until he's put a gold band on your finger, or crowned

Chapter Three

you with an ax, according to the customs of the country, and given you a bunch of fat little furless animals to suck at your breasts."

"Do stop, papa!" choked Isabel, feeling the blood pour up into her cheeks.

"This for your psychoanalysts!" cried Adrian, laughing at her discomfiture. "What have they done for women? They've boasted about making you more honest, less inhibited. And you, the sheep, have prided yourselves upon the ability to call a spade a spade—while all the time you've wanted it called a shovel."

Isabel relaxed, and stood fumbling with one of the tassels on her girdle. "It's the way you say things," she protested, although she knew that Adrian would not be deceived about the cause of her confusion. "You . . . why it's positively obscene."

"And why not?" Adrian snapped his claw-like fingers. "Nature's a passionate jade, obscene too if you like to call her so. Bah!" he growled. "Cecil has a stronger stomach for phrases and facts. You are altogether too damned aesthetic!"

He waved his hand toward a tray on which stood whisky, soda and a blue china bowl filled with ice. "Fix me a highball like the dutiful daughter you choose to think you are. Then go and bathe yourself, comb and perfume yourself, so that the lamb may be led more easily to the slaughter. I suppose he is coming to-night?"

"We're going to dine together, then meet a crowd at the theatre."

"Idiot. Get him alone."

Isabel had poured out a generous four fingers of whisky, her father's usual stipend. "Is this right?" she asked, a trifle brusquely.

"Good enough," and resentful as always of his helplessness, Adrian tasted the mixture. But as she left the room he called after her: "Put on the blue dress . . . the one with the fur. It shows your pretty—ah—shall I say neck?"

Cecil returned late in the afternoon, her cheeks glittering with color, her whole body exuding an air of health and well-being. Adrian told her that she looked like a ship with the sails set, and was in turn informed that she had walked up from Wall Street.

"You're just as mad in your way as Isabel in hers," he informed his first-born. "Go in and help your sister dress. We'll make her as attractive as possible and hasten her doom. I believe that's what kind-hearted relations are supposed to do."

"I wish you wouldn't encourage it, Adrian," said Cecil, lowering her voice. "Why did you have to fancy him, of all people? His influence over Isabel is extraordinary; he's changed her altogether."

"He hasn't. It's love." Adrian chuckled. "You mind your own business, Cecil. Let Isabel have her fun. It's the same with all sport: the harder the chase, the greater the satisfaction when you bring down your quarry. That young man will put up a fight for his freedom—and it will amuse me to watch it."

Cecil burned with resentment. "Haven't you any feelings?" she demanded. "Don't you care how much Isabel suffers, so long as you have the 'sport' of watching?"

"Damn it, my dear, everybody suffers. Let Isabel suffer for the cause of all humanity: the sex urge. Nothing could be more noble."

"You're a beast, Adrian, but I'll wager it doesn't end the way you think," and Cecil, not suspecting for a moment what the end would be, left Adrian still laughing.

SHE found Isabel naked, with the red velvet mules upon her feet, looking in the mirror. Isabel's main assets, her father had often told her, were those her clothes concealed. Her body, moulded with admirable purity of line, had still the chastity of adolescence.

It seemed as though her slender flanks and small round breasts had been superimposed upon the arrowlike straightness of childhood. She was neither completely woman nor completely girl. Her angular hair, cut in bangs across her forehead, her fair skin and the long sensitive arch of her mouth, were disturbingly suggestive of the narrow-hipped and erotic virgins of ancient Egypt.

And yet, despite her slimness and her youth, there was a vague illusion of fecundity. So Isis might have looked, Isis the goddess of the earth, whom the Egyptians called the mother of all living. . . .

Cecil, flinging her hat on to the cupboard shelf and kicking her walking-shoes into a corner, was naturally disturbed by this intrusion of the esoteric into her normal concept of her sister. But she had been schooled to control her observations, and on this occasion she remarked casually:

"Adrian seems delighted by Du Maurier's return. He's in a capital humor." There was little affection in her voice. Cecil had loved an Adrian who was no more, an Adrian of debonair manners and gay unconcern, who tossed her to the ceiling and caught her in his strong arms, and who, at the approach of Helena, said: "Damn discipline, darling. Let me play with my kiddy." All Cecil's emotion was now transferred to the younger sister to whom she had been little less than mother and far more than friend. Isabel, to be sure, was reminiscent of the former Adrian. She had much of his reckless impulsiveness, his swift intellectual curiosity, his sensitiveness to environment. But she had not his brilliant easy laughter; rather she had Helena's quiet restraint of manner, so that the deeper stirrings of passion were concealed behind a deceptive semblance of poise.

With this she generally succeeded in staving off Cecil's tentative remarks on the subject of Du Maurier; it was the first point upon which the sisters, always confidential, had manifested re-

serve. But tonight Isabel was impatient. In response to the cautious feelers extended by Cecil, she demanded:

"Just what is it you dislike about Dick, Sis? Let's get down to brass tacks."

"The *tout ensemble*," answered Cecil, stripping off her stockings and placing them carefully upon her folded petticoat. "I have the feeling that he's putting something over on us. Drawing us out for some secret purpose which is neither kind nor charitable."

"Nothing more definite than that?"

"Yes." Cecil, who was unfashionable enough to wear a narrow rubber corset, stood up, garters dangling. "I don't like mysteries. And, after all, what do we—what does anyone—know about Du Maurier? Simply that he popped up in New York after the Armistice, that somehow he gets enough money to live on, and that he knows the people one should know."

"The last should be enough."

"His line of epigrammatic after-dinner talk accounts for it. For all we know, he may be a bootlegger or a blackhand."

"But he isn't. He's a gentleman. He goes everywhere."

Cecil unhooked her corset and left it where it fell, which was a sure sign of agitation. "That's the trouble with society nowadays," she complained. "It takes up anyone. Because you met Du Maurier at a dinner given by Sarah de Paget, because he sat next to Princess Dalmetchi-Davenza and called her Cynthia, you concluded that he must be O. K. And that's the way it goes. We don't know who anyone is. Take Susie Burnham. We don't know anything about her except that she lives on Park Avenue and that her mother speaks English something in the manner of *Les Precieuses Ridicules*."

Isabel observed: "We met her at the Dalgrens," as though that were the answer. She felt that the conversation had become general, and it amused her



"By the way," she said, "Susie seemed to appreciate your sweetheart. You better watch out or she'll vamp him away." . . .

to picture Cecil getting lost in the labyrinth of her own ideas.

But Cecil was not easily side-tracked. "By the way," she said, "Susie seemed to appreciate your sweetheart. You'd better watch out or she'll vamp him away."

"And you'd like that, I suppose."

"No, my dear, I wouldn't like anything that made you unhappy."

The two girls looked at one another, and suddenly their hands clasped and clung. Cecil flushed, embarrassed by this extraordinary show of emotion.

"If it's so that God looks out for true lovers," Isabel murmured. "He won't give me that to deal with. I've my hands full managing Dick, let alone a rival."

"Never mind," answered Cecil, put-

ting her arm about Isabel's bare shoulders, "we'll see that you're lovely enough to eclipse anyone. What are you going to wear?"

Isabel made a dive into the cupboard, and emerged holding a dress of smoky blue velvet, banded with fur and quite plain except for the large kimono sleeves which were lined in silver and heavily embroidered. "Papa recommended it," she explained.

"It's a lovely color," conceded Cecil, not thoroughly pleased about that bit of information, "but it looks more like a tea-gown than a dress. Perhaps that's why."

"Perhaps," smiled Isabel, and, leaving the dress on the bed, she vanished into the bathroom, where Cecil heard her humming "La Habanera."

Chapter Four

IN her square bedroom of white and gold Susie Burnham rested after a day of enervating boredom.

She had had tea with Bertram Wowse at five, and had decided to dispense with dinner. On a small table beside her stood a lamp of carved amber, a dish of bonbons, and an empty tumbler. Her diamond wrist watch quoted the time at six-forty-five. It was seven o'clock.

Susie herself was stretched out on a chaise longue of yellow satin. Her loosened hair, spread like a robe upon the pillows, revealed unexpectedly the measure of her allurements. Beneath that cloud of radiance her face became a blurred oval, the features indistinguishable, like those in a painting of great antiquity. Her hair, holding every fragment of stray light, glittered with reflections.

Hair it was that would have stirred to their very depths the color loving souls of Titian and Rubens, hair neither copper colored nor bronzed, but the shade of a statue of old terra cotta. Immortal it was, deathlessly perfect as the silver feet of Mercury, as the face of Narcissus. . . .

"SUSIE, Susie." There was a twittering of beaded garments, and a woman came in. She was slender and admirably groomed, with ashen hair and a face that must once have had beauty, for the features, despoiled by bitterness, ill-temper, and over-indulgence, had still a trace of their former delicacy.

"Yes, mother," said Susie, without relinquishing the ruddy tresses from her loving fingers.

The woman walked to the table, picked up the empty glass, and sniffed at it.

"I thought so," said Mrs. Burnham, in a harsh sibilant voice, "you've been drinking. How common!"

"I only had one drink, mother," replied Susie, in a weary, but not apologetic tone. "Bertie and I each had one."

"Well, don't let me catch you at it again. . . ."

Mrs. Burnham was a woman who, having been forced in youth to heroic measures in order to obtain any portion of what she desired, had formed the habit of railing against fate, and of protesting against her inferiority by arrogant and overbearing behavior. Now, having gained her former ambitions without losing her former faults, an almost hysterical nervousness drove her to distraction. She feared for the security of her position, perilously attained; she was distrustful of everything and everybody; she was constantly in terror of being imposed upon, and while feeling hugely misused by life, returned its buffets with interest, chiefly to Susie, whom she loved more, and trusted less, than any other person.

That young woman, having listened in silence to the opening line of an all too familiar monologue, interrupted petulantly: "Oh, mother, I wish you'd leave me alone. Nobody can stand being nagged at from morning till night. If it weren't for my will power I'd drink all the time. Then maybe it wouldn't be so bad."

"So you'd drink all the time?" Mrs. Burnham kept her usual clear, somewhat affected pronunciation, but her grammar suffered under the stress of annoyance. "That's the gratitude I get for eating my heart out thinking of things to do for you. But never you mind. I'll speak to your father about it, and see what he thinks of a girl who wants to drink all the time." She hardened her face into martyr-esque sternness. "When your father finds out, he'll take you back to Philadelphia, where you belong. Then you'll be sorry, all right."

Susie's eyes narrowed. "If I go, you'll go too. We both know that much," she said casually. "So I guess you'll hold off."

"Will I?" screamed Mrs. Burnham, lashing herself into a tempest of fury. "You'll see whether I will, miss. You'll see!"

"If you insist," said Susie, watching her mother's face, "you can do it tonight. Father 'll be here any minute."

"What?" For a moment Mrs. Burnham's voice flattened, then righted itself. "You little vixen, you've planned this. You've known it all the time." Then, with apparent irrelevance she looked at the watch on the table. "A strange time to come. . . ."

ISAAC BURNHAM, who had not for various reasons joined his family in their recent migration, remained for the greater part of the time close to his business headquarters in Philadelphia. His trips to New York, however, were frequent and unexpected, as were his visits to his wife and daughter. Having built Mr. Burnham into a romantic figure for the benefit of their newly acquired acquaintance, they had no intention of spoiling it by showing the rough original. Mr. Burnham generally managed to pay his visits very early in the morning or very late at night.

"Why did you tell him to come at this hour?"

"Because I'm going out to the theatre, and I want to see him," replied Susie simply.

"Want to see *him*," sneered Mrs. Burnham. "Want to see a flexible bracelet, more likely, because you know if you get one I won't."

"Mother!"

"A lot you care about your father. If it weren't for his money—"

Susie had got to her feet with amazing rapidity. "Don't you dare say that to me. You get out of my room—you—you—you—"

At this opportune moment the expensive door-bell sounded its well-bred buzzer. Immediately afterwards the paterfamilias entered upon a scene of domestic bliss.

Isaac Burnham—née Burnheimer—senior member of Burnham & Levy, stocks and bonds, looked precisely what he was, an inveterate gambler, who, in his own phrase, had "needed the dough and got it." His suit was

close fitting, of inordinately loud shepherd's plaid. His orange and purple necktie was transfixed by a single emerald the size of a dime. His features were of an unmistakably Hebraic cast, his eyes both shrewd and kindly.

"Whassal this? 'Whassal this?" he blustered, as he strode into the room. "Whassal the shootin' for, heh? How's my baby?" Whereupon he clasped Susie, who had flung herself precipitately forward, in a bearlike embrace. She proceeded to burst into tears, and: "Whassamatter? Come on, kiddy, tell your old pop whassamatter," he burred, petting her.

"I'm so glad to see you, daddy. . . . Oh . . . I've missed you so. . . ." Sobbing convulsively, Susie clung to him, bewildered at the unexpected magnitude of her own misery.

"Well, come and pay your old pop a little visit—he'll make it worth your while, won't he, 'eh?" And with one arm still about his weeping daughter Isaac Burnham turned to his wife.

"Hello, Ollie," he said, "how's the world treatin' you this week? Pretty good, heh?"

"I shouldn't say it had been showering me with fortune," replied Mrs. Burnham with a sour smile. "Shall we go into the drawing room?"

"Bet your life. Drawing room, parlor-bedroom-bath, 'sall the same to papa." Hugging his daughter again, Isaac followed his wife.

Mrs. Burnham seated herself stiffly opposite the marble fireplace. Unembarrassed, Isaac appropriated the sofa, dragging Susie, who was on the verge of hysterics, down upon his lap.

"Now tell papa whassamatter. What does papa's baby want, heh?"

"I don't want any . . . thing . . ." wailed Susie, stifling her sobs upon her father's shoulder. "Nothing but a little hap . . . happiness, and . . . and . . ."

"There, Suey, there. Papa'll make you happy." And he pulled her upright. "Got the bluey blues, heh? Well, tomorrow you run into Tiffany and get yourself anything you want. I really

come here to tell you two grafters to cut down on expenses, but if my kiddie's got the blues—"

"Possibly," said the incisive voice of Olive Burnham, "if Susannah stopped drinking she would not become so depressed afterwards."

"Whadduya mean, drinking?" The kindly glow on Isaac Burnham's face gave way to a rather terrible mixture of fear and anger. "Didn't I tell you I wasn't going to have you touching the dirty stuff? Is that true?"

"No, daddy, I only had. . . ."

"'Tis so true. I'll make you sorry for this. I'm not going to have no kid of mine hitting the bottle."

Susie raised her eyes and was still as a statue of despair. She had once been plump, which made her slenderness all the more appealing. Also, as recently as the night before, she had been hilariously happy. Susie could bear her mother's impassioned outbursts, but she loved her father, and she knew that Isaac, like larger and fiercer animals, could be excessively cruel when goaded to it by pain. So Susie quivered.

But Isaac was obdurate. He shook her rudely back and forth, and, under the influence of what she considered the rankest injustice, Susie became obstinate, and, becoming obstinate, somewhat dangerous.

"I have a perfect right to drink," she cried, breaking from her father's hold and standing defiantly before the grey gas logs. "This is a free country." Then, abandoning the standard of ethics: "Anyhow, if you had mother nagging at you from morning until night—you ought to know—you didn't run away from it often, did you. No—not much!"

Here there was a sarcastic insert on the part of Mrs. Burnham, and Isaac attempted uselessly to overrule both their statements by talking in the loudest voice.

"You make her shut up, daddy!" In the end, Susie's shrill soprano held the floor. "She's just trying to be mean. It's because she doesn't want me to have a bracelet—she wants it herself."

THERE was a lull, broken, at long last, by Isaac Burnham, who jumped up in a towering fury and rushed toward the door. "You can both go to the devil," he shouted in parting. "You're no better'n a couple of gold diggers. You're after my jack, that's what you are."

And upon this truism the door slammed.

An hour later Susie, getting hooked into a tight gown of emerald green velvet, pondered upon the sorrows of mankind in general and Susie in particular. "Oh my God, I'm so miserable," she burst out at last, "nobody cares a darn about me. . . ."

"Sure I do, Miss Susie," said the pretty Irish maid who was doing the hooking.

"Then for goodness sakes hurry up a little, Barbara, or I'll be late to the theatre. . . ."



Chapter Five

THE curtain dropped at the end of the first act of "Broadway Blues."

The orchestra at once started to echo the melodies in an ingratiating undertone. Programs rustled, sleek youths slid up the aisles in patent leather pumps, women laughed and chattered.

There were only four people in the box on the upper left, and two of them were talking. Susie, a cape of green and gold brocade thrown about her shoulders, leaned forward babbling excitedly: "So Billie's mother tied up her wrinkled neck in pearls and went right off to see the terrible vamp, and she said, 'If you're after William's money, I want to tell you that he hasn't a shilling of his own.' And Ruth just smiled and answered, 'I'm so sorry, Lady Hunt, but I've plenty of money. I'm after the title, and you can't take that away.'"

"Gonderful wirl," incanted Bertram Wowse, who had the appearance of bursting out of his Bond Street dinner jacket, and smelled of scented bril-

lantine. "Done herself peroud, she did."

"Step outside and give her a toast," suggested Stockbridge Potter, looking at Cecil, who was vastly improved by her slim grey evening dress, and the thin filet of silver wound about her hair. "Plenty left in the flask."

"I feel like a million dollars already," announced Susie, "I'll stay where I am."

"Nobody with me?"

Apparently nobody was. And Potter left the box, bored by Cecil's complaints about Isabel's tardiness.

STOCKBRIDGE POTTER was a gentleman of leisure, though the sources of his income were increasingly obscure since he had succeeded in reducing the Prescott Potter estate to the vanishing point. His escutcheon, he proudly assured all comers, was, "Half a loaf is better than none," on a shield with booze rampant and Potter couchant. He had started his career in the diplomatic service, spent five years at the consulate in Cairo, and relinquished the post because he claimed the Sahara made him too thirsty. After a few years of cheerful vagabondage he returned to New York, where he had been living ever since, chiefly on the diminishing hospitality of his friends. He was a well-bred parasite, of that rare species only produced by many generations of well-bred parasites, and everybody found him a delightful companion.

Physically he was a small man, thin but not ill-formed, with a dark mustache waxed at the tips, shrewd fox-like undependable eyes, and a face which looked one thousand years old. His parchment colored skin was covered with tiny wrinkles, as though wind, and sand, and sun had wreaked havoc upon it. Yet the face was indifferent, almost enigmatic. One could not help feeling that wind and sand and sun were but fleeting and temporal, as compared with Potter's eternal amusing uselessness.

AT the rise of the curtain he returned with Isabel and Du Maurier, whom he had picked up in the lobby.

A light glowing behind the box accentuated the flush of happiness upon Isabel's face. She looked like a child, a rather excited child. Du Maurier standing with his hand upon her shoulder, was impassive as ever. But his eyes, always alert, roved out into the audience and returned, inscrutably possessed of some new information, to rest upon the face of Susie.

She greeted him with a degree of informality, and he retired—his fastidiousness faintly repelled by the odor of whiskey which hovered about her—to the rear of the box. Between four pairs of shoulders he could see the golden light of the stage, and figures patterned on the background moved across his consciousness without obtruding themselves. He was filled with a sense of contented lassitude. The hand of Isabel resting in his, the caressing semi-darkness, induced an utterly pleasing inertia. He was in a dream, and the people about him were unreal as shadows.

The brocaded wrap slipped from Susie's shoulders, and lay garlanded about the back of her chair. With a shock akin to that of awakening, Du Maurier became aware of her soft pink arm moving slowly, as she waved a fan....

The play was over soon. Too soon, everyone felt, for it had been undoubtedly amusing. Only Isabel, filled with an almost premonitive restlessness, was glad to emerge into the crispness of the night.

"Where shall we go?" Potter asked. "Montmartre?"

Du Maurier shrugged. Bertie, who felt ill at ease in his presence, chuckled self-consciously: "How about the Rendezvous? Let's go and see Wilda giggle."

"We might as well walk," suggested Cecil. "It's just across the street."

They set out in couples, moving slowly through the after-theatre crowd. It was a misty night, and a yellowish phosphorescence hung over the blazing signs and illuminated passing faces. Isabel, still reasonlessly disturbed, clung to Du Maurier's sleeve.

"We'll be there in a moment," he said.

But at the corner the small group found its progress impeded by a dense and impenetrable knot of people, pressing in about a one-legged armless soldier who shouted indistinguishably from a soap box.

There was no choice but to stand on the outskirts and listen, or pretend to listen, to his speech, which came to them in fragments over the roar of motors and the screeching of horns.

Isabel was only vaguely aware of the wan looking soldier's appeal. She was too taken up with introspection, with analysis of her mood, from which the joy had suddenly vanished. She wished passionately that she and Du Maurier had spent this first evening of his return in the studio; it was as if something of him were lost to her, here, in the crowd. She knew instinctively that his thoughts were far away, and that his fingers, caressing her wrist, did so from force of habit, and unconsciously.

Then she heard Susie call, "I—I'll be the first!"

"What's it all about?" Isabel whispered to Du Maurier, and caught a mumbled phrase which sounded like "Soldiers' Bonus." Before she realized what was happening, she saw Susie open her vanity case and take out a folded twenty dollar bill. Then the throng parted like the waters of the Red Sea before the people of Israel, and among shouts of "Yeah!" "Hurrah!" and "Oh, you k-i-id!" Susie walked down the aisle of faces, a little glittering figure with high-heeled slippers and a halo of incomparable hair. . . .

Isabel was conscious of being impelled forward. She heard Du Maurier say: "That was perfectly splendid of you, Susie Burnham," and realized that they were now standing at the very foot of the soap box. Du Maurier dug in his pocket and handed a crumpled bill to the wan soldier, whose melancholy eyes turned questioningly to Isabel.

"I haven't any money," she said in a hopeless voice. . . . Then the crowd closed in, and she was thrust gratefully back, away. . . .

Chapter Six

THE Rendezvous was a rather small restaurant, with its walls done in red, and red silk pin-wheels which remained unexpectedly stationary forming a sort of screen. There were too many tables, and there was too little floor, but the music was excellent, and the fickle fancy of dancing New York had alighted here for an instant on its flight from one spot to another.

A good table was procured, not too near the orchestra, nor too far from the space cleared for what was left of the terpsichorean art. Du Maurier, with a total disregard of anything but his own amusement, wedged himself between Susie and Isabel. Bertie produced a hammered silver flask filled with Scotch, and everybody ordered ginger ale, except Cecil, who drank hers neat, and Du Maurier, who never touched anything as plebeian as whiskey.

By this time Isabel's depression was real. The rhythm of the music, the bubbles of her highball, could not drive away a sense of sinister foreboding.

Looking about the restaurant—at the conglomeration of boys and girls with clean athletic frames, of dancing partners paid to accompany antediluvian millionairesses, of women who wore many bracelets and might be either courtesans or leaders of society or both—Isabel tried to grasp and hold the sheer animal quality of the scene. But all that she saw translated itself into something higher, something symbolic of some other and quite intangible thing, and through it all persisted the portentous sense of impending disaster.

In the end her thoughts returned to Du Maurier. To Isabel he was the Alpha and Omega of eventual happiness, the nucleus on which the fabric of her life was builded. It occurred to her that without him she would collapse like a tent from which the props have been removed. And yet tonight, more strongly than ever before, she sensed in Du Maurier that secret purpose, that

striving towards some unseen goal, and felt, for the first time, that whatever the purpose might be it reacted against her.

As she watched with curious aloofness the first unfolding of the plot, which was to complete or to destroy that invisible structure known as the future, Isabel bowed to her father's belief in the red magic of love.

SEUQUEL to her exhibition of generosity, Du Maurier had inveigled Susie into a discussion of altruism. Isabel forced herself to listen to the words which she had heard before.

"I think selfishness is perfectly rotten," Susie was reiterating.

"What kind of selfishness?" asked Du Maurier.

"Any kind. Aren't they all alike?"

"There are three chief classes, two of them in my mind justifiable."

"Why pick on three?"

"For the three types of supreme egotists," elucidated Du Maurier. "Artists, women and pigs."

"Just what do you mean . . . pigs?" asked Susie, feeling uncomfortable.

"People who don't know what they want, and consequently. . . ." Du Maurier was not looking at her, "take everything they see. That's the class my mind won't justify. I can't forgive a person for not knowing what he wants, though I can forgive murder and arson if he does."

"Go on," murmured Susie, attentive, though out of her depth.

"Well, the true female," explained Du Maurier, tapping his empty glass with one fingernail, "is absolutely ruthless. But that's because the future of the race depends upon her. She will sacrifice anybody upon the altar of her desire to find a proper father for her children. It is written so in the book of the life of man. Therefore it's not only justifiable but—I suppose—necessary."

Isabel, catching the last of his description, was struck by its similarity to what Adrian had said in the afternoon. She cut in abruptly with something of

her father's sarcasm: "Is it so important that the race be propagated? Isn't it just egotism that makes man believe anyone would lose by his complete extinction?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Du Maurier good naturedly. "But if the knowledge is not in you—you are not a true female!" And he turned again to Susie. "I don't know about the human race, but I'm sure that the continuation of art is highly important. 'For true art stays, when man decays,'" he quoted laughingly. "We have no trace of prehistoric man except bones and rude carvings. Scientists tell me they learn more from the latter."

Isabel, familiar with the argument, was silent. Susie, floundering in the quicksands of thought, ventured: "And so that's why painters have a right to be selfish? Because their work is more important than we are?"

Du Maurier nodded gravely, but his eyes were twinkling. "Miss Burnham," he remarked over his shoulder to Isabel, "will never believe in her own unimportance."

Susie, antagonized, fired back: "I certainly shan't believe that selfishness is nice—even in an artist. Even in you!"

"Why, that's dreadful," Du Maurier returned banteringly. "Because my credo is selfishness, and I've resolved to make you like me."

Susie's eyes, softening, implied that his task would not be difficult. But: "You'll have to show me," she assured him, commanding: "Now tell me about your philosophy."

"It's an old one. Lots of people have written about it, and a few have really lived up to it. Omar expressed it as no one else ever will, but the most familiar summary is in a once popular poem by Ella Wheeler Wilcox. It starts, '*This then is wisdom*,' or something like that. Do you know it?"

Susie confessed reluctantly that she did not.

"Well, Isabel does. We'll get her to recite it for us."



Isabel turned slowly, and said, without raising her eyelids: "In the first place, dear Dick, it doesn't start that way. It starts, *'For this is wisdom, to love and live.'*"

"Go ahead."

She obeyed him, haltingly at first, then bravely, at the last:

*"Speed passions ebb as we greet its
flow,
To have and to hold. . . ."*
the eyelids flickered.

"...and, in time—let go."

AN unexpected constrained silence fell upon the three of them. The orchestra was not playing; the clatter of dishes and conversation seemed far away. Out of the void Isabel heard Potter's voice chuckling:

"And the little black man just butted right in and shrieked: 'Vot! You lose your vollet?' Afterwards he turned to some women next to him and absolutely screamed—"Gvendolyn, for gawt-sake, double up your finkers over di dimonz.'"

In the laughter which followed, the



"Would you," she whispered, "be unselfish just once? Would you take me home?"

lights dimmed. The orchestra began to strum the first bars of *Tahiti*. A hush, interspersed with stamping and the very audible remarks of some Princeton youths in a far corner, fell upon the hot crowded room.

"Wilda's going to giggle. Wilda's going to giggle," howled Bertie ecstatically, beating his highball glass with the side of a knife.

To a sound like that of distant tom-toms a tall painted man ran in, shouting unintelligible words which Potter insisted upon translating as "Ohé you're

on her!" A chorus of four girls, palpably bad imitations of that which they represented, scurried about, filling the room with an oppressive, pungent perfume, which, intended to conjure up the vision of opulent tropical nights, got lost near the corner of Broadway and Forty-second Street. But a wise manager could not have furnished any more miraculous contrast, when, amid a clamorous acceleration of applause, Gilda Gray appeared.

Small and glowing, instinct with a sensuous and exciting grace, she caught

and relentlessly held to herself the attention of her jaded audience. Eager for new sensations, they found them here, in a dance as old, perhaps, as the race itself, a dance shamelessly vivid, composed of movements primitive, sensuous, eternally amazing in their faithful portrayal of emotion. . . .

"Oh Lordie. . . . I've seen this so often," murmured Susie Burnham with an undisguised yawn. "Let's clear out before she gets started. . . ."

Bertie's fat face turned up in pathetic appeal. "Oh please, Susie," he begged. "Wait and see Wilda giggle. Poor Bertie's dying to see Wilda giggle."

Susie's lips puckered into a red and sullen smile. "I wouldn't take you away for the world, as long as you're dying," she said. Turning to Du Maurier she laid her hand upon his sleeve. "Would you," she whispered, "be unselfish just for once? Would you take me home?"

Du Maurier withdrew his arm and glanced at Isabel. "Any objections?" he inquired—quite superfluously.

"Of course not," she replied, and turned to the dance floor, with a pretended utter indifference to the sound of Bertie's imbecile pleading, swiftly followed by the scrape of chairs and the murmur of brief adieus.

Before her the dance of primitive movements faintly gilded with modernity continued its inexplicable magic. And, for an instant, the white figure of the dancer, grown suddenly symbolic, appeared to be whirling in space, whirling between everlasting life and inevitable death. The hot room vanished. It seemed to Isabel that she was in a place of dark matted foliage, pierced by occasional moonbeams, heavy with mystery. It was as though a veil had been lifted and dropped again, leaving in its place a more inscrutable darkness.

As if on another plane of existence, Isabel heard Potter's voice, finishing his story. . . .

"So the woman took the biggest diamond off her finger and stuck it in her mouth for safe keeping. And the last thing Billy said as he went through

the gate was: 'I hope she doesn't choke, poor thing! . . .'"



Chapter Seven

"YE Gods, I'm tired," ejaculated Cecil, as she and Isabel stumbled up the dark hall toward the studio door. "I'm glad tomorrow is Sunday so we can sleep late. Hullo—what's this?" as she saw that the studio door was wide open.

The greater part of the studio was in shadow, but the door of Adrian's room was open, too, and through it a shaft of white light fell across the three steps, and lay quivering upon the floor.

"*Mon Dieu, mesdemoiselles*, but I am glad you have arrive," cried a voice tremulous with relief, and Anastasie, in a kimono tied down the front with fourteen stiff little bows, detached herself from the gloom. "And but it is lucky I decide to come home early," she added, waving her hands wildly. "With Monsieur le Capitaine raving like a maniac, Mesdemoiselles, but like a maniac, I assure you."

Isabel, curiously unsurprised in her state of emotional exhaustion, wondered vaguely what it was all about. "Be sensible, Anastasie," commanded Cecil sternly. "What happened?" And she paused on her way toward Adrian's room.

"He say now it is nothing," explained the maid in an undertone. "A mare of the night, as you call it. But he scream, Mademoiselle Cessy, he scream like the crazy person, about some white beast that come to get him, and he tear at his throat with his finger, so—" whereupon she tore the top bow off her wrapper, and passed her hand frantically up and down her chest.

"Is he sleeping now?" Isabel inquired, with a morbid desire to see her father, to talk to him.

"I do not know. He drive me out with such language, Mademoiselle, as I have not heard since my good father die. But first he ask for the whiskey,

and he hold it up to the light, so"—here there was another illustration—"and say in a most ugly voice: 'Anastasie, watch me drink to the white leopard, omen of misfortune and death.' And then he laugh, Mademoiselle, such a laugh that make me shiver in my skin, and tell me to get out."

Cecil looked toward Isabel. "Had we better have a doctor, do you think?"

JUST then Adrian, slightly hoarse, but intensely audible, called: "Cecil, you practical idiot, get to bed. Send Anastasie to her room, and tell her to say a prayer for my soul. I want to talk to Isabel."

Cecil, looking startled for once, glanced at her sister. Then she shrugged: "You'd better go in. He can't do worse than murder you."

Adrian was in bed, propped up against half a dozen cushions, with the covers drawn closely about him. He looked ghastly. At sight of him Isabel was conscious of a shiver of apprehension,

and wondered how long she would have to remain in his disturbing presence.

Her question was answered immediately, in an odd way. The good side of Adrian's mouth grinned, and he waved his hand toward the door.

"I've seen what I wanted," he said gently. "It's too bad. A sacrifice will certainly be demanded. Now you can go."

Isabel fled.

"What on earth did he want?" demanded Cecil, as her sister flung herself upon the bed.

"Lord knows. He's talking like an idiot. Oh, Cecil," cried Isabel, desperately. "Do you think he's crazy, stark raving crazy?" And she told Cecil what her father had said. "And seeing the white leopard, too. . . ."

Cecil frowned, and looked away. "No," she said at last. "I don't think he's crazy. I think he's had an attack of delirium tremens. I'll call a doctor in the morning."

(To be continued next month)



Oblivion

Being the meditations of two condemned men at 3 a. m.

By Reggie Van Lord

WELL, seven hours more. Yes, I did it. I'm glad. Gad, how he had taunted me. And when my fingers were closed around his throat—I was glad, GLAD. And now I'm glad. I'll swing—yes, I suppose I deserve it. But oh, well, it's done. . . .

Six hours and fifty minutes left. And then the long walk down the corridor, up to the scaffold, the gaping crowds, the priest's words, the noose—*oblivion*.

WELL, seven hours more. Yes, I did it. I'm glad. Gad, how she had tormented me. And when my arms were closed around her and my lips met hers, I was glad, GLAD. And now I'm glad. I'll be tied—yes, I suppose I deserve it. But oh, well, it's done. . . .

Six hours and fifty minutes left. And then the long walk down the aisle, up to the altar, the gaping crowds, the priest's word, the ring—*oblivion*. . . .



The Wrong Moment

By George B. Jenkins, Jr.

AFTERWARD, Mildred decided that she had picked the wrong moment to be demonstrative.

"You should let Ralph see that you like him," Mildred's grandmother had advised. "Some men need a great deal of encouragement. I would not have been married five times," the old lady went on reflectively, "to say nothing of being mentioned in so many divorce cases, if I hadn't always been perfectly wild to display new emotions. Let Ralph know you're crazy about him! Vamp him! Throw yourself at him! Wrap your arms around his neck! Be violent!"

Mildred frowned, for her grandmother was becoming quite noisy. It was true that Mildred cared for Ralph, but she felt a lot in awe of him. He was so stern, so serious.

That evening, when she entered his car to pay a visit to his parents on their country estate on the Hudson, Mildred decided to do as her grandmother suggested. The night was misty, but Ralph kept his foot on the accelerator. The tires were piercing the atmosphere at forty-five an hour. Mildred wondered how to begin, then she remembered her grandmother's exact words.

"Ralph, I love you!"

He jammed down his foot, and the sport roadster leaped forward. "Huh?" he exclaimed. His eyes sought hers for a second, then he looked back at the road just in time to dodge a limousine.

"I worship you! I adore you!" Mildred cried. She caught his arm. "I want you, want you, want—" She threw both arms around his neck, clung to him desperately.

"What the—"

Though Ralph fought frantically to control the car, her strong young arms interfered. The machine swerved to the side of the road, broke through the guard rail on the lip of the precipice, hesitated briefly, then the engine pulled it over and down.

As the roadster began its fall, Mildred decided that she had picked the wrong moment to be demonstrative.



A MAN considers a kiss as dessert, a woman looks upon it as the main course.



A MAN may propose to a woman because she reminds him of the woman he loves.



J She was the prettiest typist in town. She was so pretty that the stock-room boys and the clerks fidgeted every time she came out of the private office. But she was

Guaranteed NOT to Marry

. . . and that Guarantee was responsible for a bewildering situation.

By Viola Burhans

"THIS makes the fourth in a year. What's the matter with us, Benjie?"

Benjamin Slater snorted. "This firm's getting to be a regular matrimonial bureau," he grunted, as he swept Rita Steinson's blue-tinted note into the waste-basket.

Rita was a coquettish, blushing-cheeked stenographer. Her letter, addressed to Mr. Garret Crosby Hunt, informed that bewildered young man that she had just married the eye-shaded Gregory Adams who sat at the front of the shipping-room. The reasons given in her note were somewhat vague, but an astute person might have deduced that Rita had become aware, over night, as it were, of some odd nine million nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine marriageable women perfectly willing to lie in wait for her somewhat fickle Mr. Adams; and since one of them at least, was right under her nose at their joint boarding-house, this sudden action on the part of the capable Rita was not so greatly to be wondered at.

"The girls we get are too good-looking," Hunt advanced. "That's why they marry. Because they can. Take Miss Steinson—"

Again Benjamin snorted, this time in interruption. At nine o'clock in the morning, he had no patience with anything that started off like romantic psychoanalysis. Benjamin was ambitious

and to him business was prune-plain business. He knew the destination of every pound of tea and coffee that went out under the Hunt & Slater trademark for the day. Long before Gary had boarded the bus for downtown, Benjamin was ferreting around their small floor of offices jotting down points on his 3 x 5 manila pad. He figured that if he could build up the business enough to warrant his putting into it the ten thousand or so that he had to his credit in other securities, it might be a paying investment for him in the end.

GARY could not own to any special ambition. The business had come down to him from his father and the young man had accepted it pleasantly, content to let "Backbone Benjie," as he regarded his partner, keep the trade on a money basis and sweat over the planning and purchasing ends. Yet no one knew better than Benjie that it was Hunt who made the business and kept it on a slow gain. Mornings Gary would drift in, invariably late, but with that smile that made him invaluable in booking new trade. And all day that smile bossed and won everybody from the plug-hard Benjie down to Barney the boy who crated the boxes for the trade.

Gary, in a word, was a young man whom nobody would have had the

slightest hesitancy in trying twice. His crinkly hair was very bright, there was tan in his cheeks and his eyes were as blue as a blue fire-streak in a seashell. Money-making, but not money-mad, the modest emporium of Hunt & Slater was little on his mind. After the dictation was finished, he had a way of stretching back in his chair and day-dreaming of the things that had mostly to do with out-of-doors—brooks sucking smoothly under plank road-bridges, the smell of pitch, and the clean crackle of a stick of pine splintering under a blow from his axe, fields briared with berry-runners, woods tangled with underbrush and pine burs buried in sand.

This morning, however, he brought himself resolutely down to the business at hand:

"Let *me* engage our next stenographer. I'll get some plain, brainy girl—"

"You can't get 'em plain," Slater interrupted. "They know better than that."

"I'll have one installed here before noon," Gary promised, and Benjamin shrugged as he went out with a tray of mail.

Hunt recalled that the Reid & Chandler Agency had sent them Miss Steinson. No doubt they could rush down another nimble-witted girl. When he got them on the wire, a business-like voice informed him that the Agency would send down at once a very smart-looking girl, A-1 in speed—

"That's exactly what we don't want," Gary interrupted "a 'smart-looking' girl. Haven't you got anyone around who's—who's rather plain-looking? In fact, what we want—" he gathered courage from the silence at the other end of the wire—"is a girl as plain as—as plain as—" he cleared his throat. This thing, after all, wasn't going to be easy. He was glad that Benjie was not within earshot. "As plain as—" why didn't the word come? The only one that did, he didn't dare say. And then to his consternation, it slipped out. After that, there was nothing to do but make an apology. . . .

It was accepted frigidly and the woman in charge of the Bureau, seized the opportunity to give him a live-wire lecture on the value of personal appearance as a business asset until finally Gary's lion-like assurance melted into a kind of lamb-like silence and he hung up the receiver.

That ended it, he vowed, mopping his brow. He was through with Agencies. Let Benjie try the next one. Why were all women fools in matters that had to do with their faces? He rasped open the paper and turned to the "Situations Wanted" columns. Suddenly his down-roving finger stopped

Experienced stenographer. Ready for work at once. Speedy. Permanent. Guaranteed not to marry. Call Trynor, Plaza 3097.

Guaranteed not to marry! What in the name of all that promised to be interesting could that mean? Gary's imagination caught at the phrase. He turned it over every which way and concluded finally, in a kind of back-patting glow of pleasure, that there could be but one explanation. The girl was just naturally so plain-looking that marriage for her was out of the question. And she had sense enough to know it, and to realize that many a firm would regard this implied permanency as an asset and be willing to pay for it.

"Just the one for us!" he chuckled as he took down the receiver. Hadn't he promised Benjie to get some plain, brainy girl? . . . But at the first sound of her voice, a pricking doubt shot across his mind. Some inner quality of loveliness in her tone put him at a loss. Her words, however, were business-like.

Yes, she would be at his office in half an hour. Gary hoped fervently that she had not noticed the stammer in his voice. Why was he always that way when speaking to an attrac—he caught himself up sharply. If this Miss Trynor were too plain to marry, surely she could not be attractive. Probably at this very moment she was speculating as to the amount that would be in her pay envelope and—

He crossed over absently to the

cabinet and selecting a fresh piece of soap, washed his hands. In the shipping-room outside, he encountered Benjie.

"Any luck?"

Gary nodded. "She'll be over in fifteen minutes." And then as he passed him on his way back into his office, he confided in a low tone: "Whale of a looker' Benjie!"

He was digging down into the suspense file when the door opened and a brand-new Barney, tongue-tied and saucer-eyed, piloted a young woman toward his desk. One look, and Gary instinctively rose to his feet. There had been some mistake, of course. That confounded Agency had gone ahead and sent—he stopped to hope devoutly that Benjie had his door closed for Gary was suddenly aware that right here in his office was the most beautiful girl in the world and the thought went over him like a shot that by the merest chance he might have missed her! Mechanically he set out a chair, his mind for the moment concerned with nothing but the velvet-brownness of her eyes and her copper-colored hair that flicked in little curling wisps about her brow.

"I am Miss Trynor," she advanced, after a fraction of a second's hesitation. "You telephoned me about the position."

Gary nodded. For the life of him, he could not think of a single appropriate thing to say.

"I understand that you need a stenographer."

This was familiar ground, and happily Gary found his tongue.

"Yes, if there is anything on earth we need just now it is a stenographer. But—" he stopped. He had a quick, disturbing vision of Benjie's ironic countenance. Was this the exceedingly plain person that he had so blatantly bragged about to that individual not fifteen minutes ago?

"I am afraid," he forged ahead, "that you are not—er—just the kind of stenographer we want."

"Why not? I can do your work. I know French and Spanish, and I have

very good speed. What more do you want?"

"We—" Gary jerked at his collar. "We don't want so much. Your qualifications are entirely too high. You see, we—we are not a very large firm, Miss Trynor."

"Then let me help you grow." She pressed open her note-book.

"No." Gary reluctantly shook his head. "I am sorry, but you won't do. It is this way," he explained, noting her look of bewilderment. "The interests of our business demand that we get a girl who—who won't leave us in the lurch in another six months or so, by marrying. We've had that happen to us four times in the past year and Mr. Slater and I both feel that we must guard against this occurring again by taking on a—an exceptionally plain girl."

To his further discomfiture, she began to laugh:

"Then I'm just the one you want. Oh, I know I'm not plain-looking, but I certainly do not intend to marry. Didn't you see that in my 'ad'? I'm sort of—I suppose you might say I'm guaranteed in that direction."

"You're bound to marry!" burst from him. "A girl like you—" he checked himself suddenly.

"My looks have nothing to do with it," she met him matter-of-factly. "I have quite made up my mind not to marry. But in any case," here a note of reproach crept into her voice, "you ought to be glad that I look exactly as I do. Most everybody is. If you can get the same amount of work out of some little beauty of a machine as you could out of some old rusty piece of junk patched up to last over night, wouldn't you be foolish not to choose the good-looking machine?"

Such logic was, of course, unanswerable. But the uneasy Gary made one more attempt.

"You *should* marry," he admonished sternly.

"Are you going to talk that way, too?" she returned patiently.

He was silent.

"If I give you this position," he said finally, "how long will that 'guaranteed-not-to-marry' clause hold good?"

She appeared to be weighing something. "That will depend upon you, Mr. Hunt."

"Upon me!" Gary started. No further words came to him. For that matter, it would have been apparent even to the stolid Barney that she had him mouse-holed no matter what argument he might have advanced. So with the mental reservation that the cynical Benjie could explain the situation any way he pleased, he began to leaf over the correspondence.

IT was eleven o'clock when Benjie came in with the second installment of mail. He gave one glance at Carnis Trynor; then, with a nod and a word to the girl in response to Gary's somewhat defiant introduction, he went over toward a set of files and sat down on the edge of a radiator.

He couldn't understand it, no, not for the life of him! There was Gary, cool and handsome as a live pickerel, and somehow he had managed to cage up in his office this wonderful young person and was calmly dictating the usual letters about tea and coffee. To a girl like that! And too, when only that morning they had agreed that the next girl they took on should be as plain as a gas meter! Benjamin sighed and dipped into their Trade Journal until Hunt had finished and Miss Trynor had gone to her machine in the next room. Then he said slowly:

"You are one liar, Gary! So this is the exceedingly plain person."

Gary pointed in defense to the marked advertisement in the newspaper. Benjamin read it through twice.

"'Guaranteed not to marry.' What does she mean by that?"

"What it says, she says."

"But the moment you saw her you must have realized—" he made an expressive gesture.

"The moment I saw her I realized—" Gary stopped. "And I bet you did, too," he finished.

Benjamin went over to the window.

"A girl like that to work for us," he reflected. And suddenly he thought of the chances of oil stock and took out his pad and did some figuring. Gary was annoyed.

II

THE next morning Gary was dictating when there appeared across the sunlight on his glass-topped desk an angular shadow. It was a long shadow, a bony shadow. Gary discreetly finished his sentence and then looked up. The grotesque shadow was cast by a woman who wore a small round hat wound around on one side by an immense brilliant feather and stabbed by two glass-headed pins. She was dressed in a saffron-colored suit and carried a frayed alligator bag.

A second glance convinced Gary that here was an almost perfect specimen of the simon-pure plain person that both he and Benjie had so ardently desired no less than twenty-four hours ago. He should have been overwhelmed with joy, for if appearances are any criterion this bony lady bade fair to sink or swim with the firm for the next forty years. But so illogical is the male human that, as she started to explain her presence in a voice that matched the saffron-colored suit, Gary's bright face became coldly impassive.

"I am Miss Lundy—from the Reid & Chandler Agency. They told me what you wanted. I guess you can't do any better than me. I'm permanent as long as you want me." She began taking out the pins from the hideous hat.

Gary started to reply, but catching Miss Trynor's amused eye, he reddened and mentally anathematized the innocent Benjie. Why did Benjie have to choose just this morning to spend down at the warehouse taking stock? He could have settled this over-sure person in two minutes, for the plainer the woman the plainer Benjie could talk. But Miss Lundy had formed her own interpretation of his silence.

"Say it," she encouraged. "I'm not

sensitive. I know how I look. You don't have to spare my feelings and you can't hurt them."

Then Gary found his voice:

"You are a little too late. The position was filled yesterday morning."

"Filled yesterday—where is she?"

Carnis colored brightly. She had never looked prettier. Miss Lundy stared at her a full moment, then mechanically put one arm back into her jacket sleeve.

"And the Agency said you wouldn't take nobody unless they were as plain as a briar patch. Well—"

She took out a card and laid it on Hunt's desk.

"Let me know," she sniffed philosophically, "when you want somebody permanent."

She shuffled out, and Miss Trynor and Gary began simultaneously to laugh. In the midst of their merriment Benjie unexpectedly appeared and at once he made the important discovery that there was no sound in the world half so pretty as Carnis Trynor's laugh. It made him wonder why he shouldn't take over the greater part of the dictation. The thought of Gary caging himself up day after day right across from a girl like Miss Trynor became suddenly unbearable to him. Besides, he reasoned unreasonably, why shouldn't Gary take off his letters on the dictaphone?

THAT was the beginning, and during the next few months it was evident even to the day-dreaming Gary that Carnis had started the tender growing of romance in Benjamin Slater's heart. As was characteristic of the man, Slater mapped out a straight course. He pried loose his small capital and invested it in oil and the venture turning out well, the gratified Benjie changed his tailor and bought a new car. The business girl of today, so he decided, admired speed.

Carnis appeared to be no exception. And then again she was, which gave Benjamin his hour of puzzled, uneasy thought. She accepted his invitations to

lunch on the ground that since she belonged to the firm, if Benjamin wanted her to write letters or eat a salad with him during lunch hour, she could not reasonably object. But try as he would, he could never get her to allow him or his car to have any part in her evenings. After five o'clock she made it plain that she was evidently on her own; and where she lived, or any of the other hundred-and-one things about her that Benjamin might have wished to know, he had no above-board method of finding out.

As for Gary, speculations along these lines did not occur to him. In so far as Carnis was concerned, from the first he had accepted Benjamin as the deserving one. He admired the blunt way in which Benjie drove right along. And he believed that lately his partner had made a lot of money. Slater talked a great deal about this stock or that broker, and his newspaper was always open at the market quotations.

Gary's genial outlook changed suddenly the day he came upon the two having a steak at Randall's. Away down at the end of the room he caught sight of them, and even at that distance he could see that Carnis was all laugh and lip and eye. Her way. Gary sat down a safe number of tables away and ordered a salad. As he pecked at it, watching Carnis surreptitiously, he reflected gloomily that the girl had held out pretty well. It was nearly six months ago since he had taken her on, and in fairness he had to admit that if it had to be someone, well, Benjie wasn't a bad sort.

He went out finally, his thoughts in a kind of blue fog. What was the matter with him, he wondered, as he walked on down a block or two. Nothing seemed right. Yet he was well, he had a good business, it brought him in a fair enough—suddenly he stopped, for it struck him like a clap that his tea and coffee business was on the same footing exactly that it had been five years ago when his father left it. Why hadn't he put a little life, a little spring into it? Other young men—his thoughts

reproached him as he returned to the office.

His dispirited attitude lasted over the next morning. Somehow, it seemed to have something to do with Benjie. He had a disturbing sense that, figuratively, all of his prized meat-bones had been unearthed while he slept and trotted away by his enterprising partner. In the next room he heard Miss Trynor's machine clipping away, and as he listened he began to dream about the sun-flecks in Carnie's brown eyes. The brown wonder of her little slin' wrists!

WHEN she came in that noon before going to lunch, the haze in his brain suddenly cleared and lightning-swift he discovered the one thing that mattered for him in the world. Those brown eyes across from Benjie day after day! Those little brown wrists for Benjie to hold, those geranium-red lips for Benjie to kiss! How could he have been so blind, so contented to sit by and let Benjie forge ahead and capture this one girl, made so wonderfully just to be woven into his dreams? His chance at the beginning had been equal. Why had he not taken it? Now, it was too late. Only last night—the first time to his knowledge—Benjie had taken Carnie to see "The Bow Knot." Gary supposed it was all settled between them by this time. Probably at any moment now Benjie would come in and—

His door opened quickly and slammed shut behind Slater. It was the first time Gary had seen Benjie that morning, and at once he noticed something different, excited, about him. He came up to the desk, gripped an edge with both hands, and spoke abruptly:

"Do you know who we've got working for us?"

Gary waited. Benjie was always in a hurry, but you could never hurry him.

"The granddaughter of old John Trynor. Yes, sir," as Gary sat up straight, "the millionaire! Took the girl home after theatre last night, and the old man was waiting up and the housekeeper and—what is that?"

There was some kind of commotion

in the shipping-room outside. They could distinguish Barney's respectful tones, then a pompous voice that was unfamiliar to Gary.

"Thought so." Benjamin jammed on his hat, and mumbling something that Gary did not catch, shot out of the rear exit. The next instant Hunt's door was flung open and his visitor—a splendid old figure, white of brow and hair—paused on the threshold, his keen eyes looking venomously at the young man.

"Where is my granddaughter?"

Gary rose politely. He proffered a chair which was not so much as glanced at.

"Miss Trynor has gone to lunch. Won't you be seated, sir?"

"I will not. So this is the place, filled with tradespeople—a one-horse tea and coffee house—in which my granddaughter wastes her time!"

"I would not put it that way," Gary corrected mildly. "We generally manage to keep Miss Trynor pretty busy."

"We! You! This is—this is preposterous, young man. What right have you to make her sit over a fool machine tapping out your fool letters?" He glared about, his bushy brows meeting.

Gary tipped back throughfully. "I've often thought the same thing myself," he admitted. "Even before I knew she was your granddaughter."

"You mean to tell me that you didn't know Carnie Trynor is my granddaughter!"

"Not until five minutes ago," the genial Gary replied.

"Poppycock! You must have known all along."

"But I didn't." The words were still mild, but there was a glitter in Gary's blue eyes. "Miss Trynor advertised for the position, and when I engaged her I hadn't the slightest idea—"

John Trynor thumped down his cane:

"Don't you lie to me, young man. Everybody knows my granddaughter. You're like all the rest of them, a fortune-hunter."

Gary rose suddenly. His face was white. He approached the elderly gentlemen slowly:

"John D. Rockefeller himself"—he spoke as if choosing his words—"could not come into my office and say that to me. Now, you get out of here!"

He began backing the amazed Trynor out of the office. On the threshold of the outside door, he paused. "And don't ever walk in here again and accuse me of being a fortune-hunter. If I want a fortune"—he held open the door, "I'll earn it. Your granddaughter can't give it to me." And with these words, he closed the door behind the astounded old man and went back into his office.

TRYNOR stood a moment, looking uncertainly up and down the street, and thus it happened that Carnis, returning from her lunch, came upon him unawares. She stopped in surprise.

"Why, Grandfather, what brought you down here?"

He wheeled around quickly. He had not yet got himself under control.

"I—there's a man in there, a m-man," he stuttered.

"Garret Crosby Hunt," she prompted. "What did he do to you?"

"Well—I guess he put me out." Then, catching himself: "What have you to do with it?" he glared. "Go about your work."

III

SATURDAY Carnis came to the office evidently prepared to enjoy her half holiday. Her rough suit and plaid top-coat brought in an out-of-door touch and Gary noticed the picnic hamper she set down to one side of her machine, covering it with blue-prints so that Benjie did not see it.

"Mr. Hunt," she asked seriously, "which do you like best, jam sandwiches or currant-jelly tart?"

"Why—jam sandwiches," he hesitated.

Carnis smiled in the direction of the hamper. "You are going with me," she said to the astounded Gary.

The events of that morning were never quite clear to Gary. He remembered that about closing time Carnis

flung the coat across the hamper and setting it down in front of him, reminded him that they would miss their train if they didn't hurry.

Gary hadn't the slightest idea what train they would miss, nor had he any choice. It could run to Brooklyn or to Bokhara, as far as he was concerned, if the rules of the road did not prohibit him from carrying the hamper or Carnis's coat. Nor did the genial Gary display any curiosity when finally they left the train and began to plod through heavy sand toward the bluest water he had even seen.

"It is just beyond the turn there," Carnis remarked. But Gary retained his happy silence. He knew there could be nothing beyond any turn anywhere half so entrancing as the slim figure beside him.

CARNIS brought him to a stop almost at the water's edge. Behind them rose a sun-warm rock bedded in white pepper sand. The bay dipped away from them, crescent-shaped, and the village they had just left stretched out indistinctly, covered by a lowering blanket of mist. Gary took off his cap and, shading his eyes, looked far out.

They sat down in the sand, leaning against the rock, and emptied the hamper. It was not until the last jam sandwich had disappeared that Gary's light-heartedness left him and that curious depression came back again.

He sat looking fixedly out over the bay, agreeing with himself that there was a whole fistful of things wrong with the world. When a man worshipped so much as the smallest gloved finger of a girl and couldn't talk to her about it—!

And how he could have been so blank-witted as to allow himself to picnic with Carnis Trynor, on a thin run of beach, sun-warm, and lapped by little splashes of water that kept up a magic whispering about nothing on earth but the girl's face, with its thumb-pressures of pink, and dashes of red in just the right places, and with hair—Gary drew in his breath.

Unquestionably, he had been more than short-sighted in letting himself be led to this delectable spot—a place just fashioned for lovers, where he wanted to be one himself and for the next six hours tell Carnis Trynor that he had loved her ever since this thin little strip of sand first poked its shining head out of the blue water. And of course, he couldn't do it. She was all but a millionaire. In comparison, he hadn't so much as glove money to offer her. Even if he worked his whole lifetime—at the thought, an inspiration came to him. That was it; he would work, work day and night! . . .

"Whatever are you thinking of?" The one voice in his world brought him to a quick start. Carnis had sat down in a friendly way at his side. She leaned back against the cliff, hugging her knees up to her pink chin, her eyes following his to the sea.

He tried to take stern hold of himself, but before he realized what he was saying he whipped out emphatically:

"I am thinking of you,—of exactly who you are."

"Well?" She began patting out a smooth spot in her coat.

"You are John Trynor's granddaughter, and you don't have to take my dictation." To his surprise, she smiled.

"And you bring that up now,—to spoil our picnic."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I knew you'd find out." And as he did not reply, she added reproachfully: "We've never had a half Saturday picnic before, and now you have to go and bring Grandfather in it. And if you knew how obstinate and peppery he is, and what an unbudging imbecile—"

"You live up in that big white house on the Drive," he interrupted.

"Do you want me to live on a park bench?" And then: "Are you through?" she laughed suddenly.

"No. Why did you go to business?"

She hesitated a moment. "For no—very original reason. I was tired of living in Grandfather's house and of being nothing but—correct. I wanted to

do something on my own. At first, Grandfather wouldn't hear of my taking a business course. We fought two solid months. When he finally consented, he wagered I wouldn't last six months in an office. I took him up on it and we put up a fine, big bet."

"But why—?" Gary's voice was bewildered.

"Well,—I'm good-looking, and for that reason he had an idea that some man would just up and marry me before I had a word to say about it. He was—partly right," she admitted. "Some several men did want to marry me. . . . I tried three offices before yours."

Gary jumped up suddenly and started to walk around in a small circle. Then, as suddenly, he came back and sat down again.

"That's why I put that 'Guaranteed not to marry' in my ad," she continued. "I knew that any firm attracted by that phrase meant business, and that in such a house I could win my bet and make Grandfather eat humble pie. You've no idea," she reverted again, "how haughty and high-spirited and high-headed he is. But he's fair, too. When I won out, he wrote me a check without a word."

"The six months are up?"

"Last week," she nodded absently. For a time after that they were silent. Why in the world, Gary groaned inwardly, instead of being such a dreamer, such a drifter, hadn't he made a better showing at his business? He stole a glance at the girl. Was ever one so near, so copper-haired and so enticing? And some other man—with something like a mental wrench, he pulled himself together.

"Now that you have won," he made his voice normal, "I don't suppose you feel bound by that phrase any more."

"N-o. Unless you feel that in fairness to your firm—" she hesitated.

"I should not want to feel anything so obviously unfair to you."

"Nor to yourself."

He started. Could she possibly believe that he was not satisfied with her work? He began to convince her to the contrary, but in the midst of his vehemence

mence she faltered an interruption:

"Mr. Hunt, I—I think I'd better tell you something." And at the sound of her voice he steeled himself for the worst. "I could not speak of this to anyone else, but I think you will understand. You may perhaps know what I ought to do. This may surprise you, but just lately I have come to—" she paused nervously—"to care very deeply for a man and—did you speak?"

After a second, the reply came: "No, Miss Trynor."

"I want your advice," she continued. "I intend to—I hope to marry this man."

So it had come. It seemed to him that he started, but he could have sworn that he sat perfectly still.

"No doubt you'll be glad to hear that it is—someone you know."

Someone he knew! Rapidly he began running over the names of the men of his acquaintance, then broke off with a quick, sharp breath. Benjie, of course! The name became suddenly meaningless, preposterous, to him. Benjie, a little hard-boiled machine who hadn't a thought in his mind that did not have to do with the coffee business! Gary shivered, then in a flash it occurred to him—how despicable his green-eyed silence must appear. With another wrenching effort he got himself in hand and turned toward her with his brightest smile:

"Carnis—may I call you that, now?—before I tell you the nice thing or two I mean to, you won't mind my guessing that the fortunate man is Mr. Slater?"

"Mr. Slater!" Had Benjie been deaf, blind, dumb and sixty, she could not have gasped in greater surprise. "I have no intention whatever of marrying Mr. Slater."

Gary was so taken aback that he forgot to be sorry for poor old Benjie. "You said that I knew him," he floundered. Then an awful thought took possession of him. Could it be possible that some little clerk out in the shipping-room—he turned toward her sternly:

"Tell me his name," his voice sounded as if he had the right to know.

"Don't snap at me like that," she defied. "How can I tell you his name when—when he hasn't asked me to marry him yet?"

This time Gary sat back in sheer amazement. "Yet you say you are going to marry him?"

"I certainly am." Her voice was confident. "I love that man, and I'm sure he feels the same way toward me."

"Then why doesn't he—"

"He will—in time. I just know that in a week at the most—"

"A week!" For the first time Gary laughed shortly and a little bitterly. "It wouldn't take a man who *cared* a week or a day or a minute even to tell a girl like you so!"

"That shows how mistaken you are! You see, in some way it reached this man's ears that I am John Trynor's granddaughter and that we have a—lot of unnecessary money. And now I don't believe he is *ever* going to ask me to marry him. I'll probably have to do the whole thing myself," she ended tranquilly.

"But—" Gary was delicately feeling his way—"if the man has no money—"

"He has plenty enough money!" she broke in. "He only thinks he hasn't. You've no idea how proud and high-headed he is. Grandfather couldn't have been a bit worse at his age. I don't believe he is thirty yet, but he's got some kind of silly idea in his head that from now on he must spend the best part of his life using himself up to make money before he can even *ask* me to marry him. And every day we're wasting—"

She stopped suddenly, a thing of wrath and beauty, flaming with conviction. Gary was humbled. Then he had an inspiration:

"Why don't you tell him just what you're telling me?"

"I have," she astounded him. And then, catching his doubtful look, she amended: "Of course, I haven't—exactly told him in so many words."

"And you are sure that—he cares

for you?" Nothing but Gary's mental haze was responsible for the question.

"Absolutely. Wouldn't *you?*" The unexpected naiveté of the question quite disarmed Gary.

"Wouldn't *IT*?" he exploded. "What man in his right senses could help—" then furiously red-faced, he checked himself abruptly.

"What were you saying?" she queried softly.

He dug rapidly into the sand.

"You know what I started to say," he vouchsafed uneasily.

"Perfectly," she acquiesced. "Why didn't you finish? You were going to say that no man in his right senses could help loving me, now weren't you?"

"Really, Carnis," he deprecated, his heart pounding. He tried to stare out to sea but in the end he looked at Carnis, and with his worship rose rebellion.

"What are you trying to make me say?" he asked huskily.

"You know," she reminded him softly.

"And if I said it, do you think it would be fair to—to this other man you've been telling me of?"

"Perfectly!" she cried.

Gary sat silent. What was the use of trying further to understand?

"Do you mean," Carnis resumed after a moment, her voice sweet with long patience, "that you—care—for me?"

Then at last Gary turned and dropped his hand swiftly over hers:

"I adore you. I always have. You know it well enough. Now, I hope you are satisfied!"

"Goodness, what a temper!" she smiled gently. Then she queried: "Why don't you say the rest?"

"The rest?"

"That's a nice way to ask a girl to marry you, to fly into a rage and let her—"

"I am *not* asking you to marry me!" he broke in fiercely.

"Then you should. . . . If you really cared," she reproached, starting to withdraw her hand, but he retained it savagely.

"Am I in a position," he inquired tensely, "to ask you to marry me? After what you told me about that other man?"

"I never said a word about *another* man," she retorted.

"Besides," he continued almost unaware of her last words, "do you suppose I feel any differently than he does about that unearthly pile of money? Would you have me—"

"Yes, I would have you, Gary," she intercepted, suddenly very slender and close against his arm. "Grandfather's money has nothing to do with it. If you could get that out of your mind for a moment and think of—just me."

"Just you!" he repeated blankly. "That's all I've thought of for six solid months! Your Grandfather's money has never crossed my mind."

She laughed:

"And that man I was telling you of," she added, "that makes no difference, either. I'll always go right on adoring him, so you may as well get used to it. Nothing you could ever say or do—" suddenly she stopped in confusion, for he was looking directly into her eyes. . . . "Say or do," she began again, but the words trailed off indistinctly, while slowly, very slowly, understanding dawned on Gary.

"Carnis! You mean me? You *do*!" he choked out rapturously. "All the time you meant me!"

"There was never—anyone else," she stammered shyly; and the next moment, instinctively, they were in each other's arms. It was some time before Gary, dubiously, touched earth again.

"Your Grandfather will never consider—"

"You don't know Grandfather," she interrupted promptly. "You are the first man who ever forgot enough about his money to tell him so, and ever since that day you were so magnificent and drove him out of your office, he's stormed about you every night. And last night—" she paused.

Gary looked up doubtfully.

"Last night," she finished triumphantly, "he started it again, just as

peppery and high-headed as ever. And when I told him that I—I had made up my mind to marry, he lost his temper and said that with his consent—

"I knew it," Gary broke in.

"He said," she repeated, "that with his consent you were the only man I should ever marry!"

GARY'S relief was so great that he mopped his brow and as he pulled

out his handkerchief, a card dropped at his feet.

He picked it up, and they read it together:

Miss Ophelia Lundy, Stenographer,
Experienced, speedy, permanent.

Reid & Chandler Agency.

They looked at each other and laughed.

"I'll send for her Monday," Gary said promptly.



Practically Speaking

By Berton Braley

MY dear, the most gorgeous of girls are
In no manner equal to you.
To me you're more precious than pearls are,
Than opals and diamonds, too.
No riches on earth could dissuade me
From worshipping you, you alone,
No sum that could ever be paid me
Would make me forsake you, my own.

You're dearer to me than success is
Or fame in its highest degree,
The least of your lightest caresses
Is more than an empire to me.
Yachts, motor-cars, houses—you're worth more
Than these, and I'm telling you true
There aren't any splendors on earth more
Decidedly precious than you.

You're worth more than jewels and money—
But less than potatoes and steak,
And less than good hot cakes with honey
Or beans such as mother can bake.
So long as I'm fed I won't flout you,
My heart with deep love is imbued,
But frankly, I *could* live without you
And where would I be without food!



The Secret

By Louise de Salis

I LOOKED at Mary. She was the only woman in our set whose husband was still devoted to her. She wasn't pretty. She wasn't even smart. But she was the picture of contentment, which was more than could be said of the rest of us. Evidently, she possessed a secret which we other women had not been alert enough to discover. Yet we had more brains, at least we used them oftener than she did. When a woman marries she either becomes more stupid or more fascinating, and as long as we knew Mary, she and fascination had never coincided.—I was curious. How did she manage it? Her husband was a man any woman would be glad to marry. He was good-looking, clever, and had yards of money. His wife had no need to talk about his good invisible points, to make up for his lack of visible ones.

After three cups of tea, the atmosphere grew cosy and chummy. I bucked up courage, and fired the question at Mary, point blank:

"How is it you succeed where we have failed? Anne is beautiful, and has three adorable children. Eileen is charming, and a wonderful housekeeper, her maids are always competent, as well as stationary. I, myself, have some reputation of not being quite an ass, but here we are, with what result! Our husbands philandering, while yours who could have almost any woman he wishes, is blissfully unaware of any woman but you."

Mary smiled. She slowly finished her toasted muffin. It was her second, and she already weighed more than her quota.

"It's so simple, my Dear! I'll tell you all about it, would have told you long ago, if you'd asked me. Why have I succeeded where you and the others have failed? Simply because I solved that problem before I was married."

"Oh!" I interrupted. "That's a bit too thick. How could you solve a matter like that, *before* you were married?"

This time Mary laughed as she answered: "Very easily! I knew that only energetic men have the time and inclination to bother with more than one woman, so I selected for my husband, a *lazy man*."



WHEN a woman looks at a man dreamily, she is usually thinking of another one.



A MAN'S happiest hours are spent in his cups, a woman's before her glass.



ONE half of the world has no business knowing how the other half lives.



J He had married the wrong woman! So he complained—to the other woman—the woman he thought “understood” him. . . Things were drifting into a pretty mess when something happened that brought up

The Other Side of the Story

By Frederic Arnold Kummer

THE HOTEL ROOM, though small, was cosily comfortable. In a deep chair near the window lolled a woman, young, handsome, with sullen eyes, and a mouth that could be as cruel as it was beautiful. Her slender, seductive figure was scarcely covered by a dressing gown of chiffon and lace.

A package of letters lay in her lap, all addressed in the same stiff masculine handwriting. With a cynical smile twisting her petulant lips she took up the first of the letters and began to read its closely written pages:

DEAREST GIRL: What a relief to get your letter after a Sunday at home! Why do men marry, anyway, or rather, why do they always seem to marry the wrong woman? Now if it had only been you—but that, unfortunately, is another story.

How is the show going? I wish you had a *real* part. We must find you one, dear. I'm sending you a book we've just published, called “The Parrot,” which I'm sure has a play in it. Read it, and let me know what you think. I want something that will give you the chance you deserve, and keep you right here in New York for a year, at least, so that we can see each other every day. This separation is even harder than I thought it would be, which is saying a

great deal. And to think that you're going to be away all winter! Sometimes I almost wish the show would fail, just to bring you back to me. It's pretty awful, dear girl, not having you here—the inspiration of you. I don't wish to say anything unkind about my wife—she does the best she can, I suppose—but I always am reminded of something Shaw said, about muffins—right enough, in their place, but not likely to prove inspiring three times a day. Pretty low-down thought on my part, I suppose, but, unfortunately, it's true.

Let me know where you will be playing next week, and the week after, and all the other long weeks before you come back to me again. And write—as often as you can. Your letters mean everything, now that you are gone—your letters, and the memory of our wonderful summer. Nothing can ever take that away from us.

Good by for a little while, dear girl.

Your
Phil

Friday

DEAR: I was sure you would agree with me about the book. It is a big part, but not too big—for you. I'll get hold of some good man—Garvin or Matthews—and have a dramatization

made at once. I figure not over six in the cast, and two sets—it could be put on, and *kept* on, too, for twenty-five or thirty thousand. I've been taking a little flyer in the market that ought to turn in just about enough profit to put the thing through. It will be wonderful, for us to do this play together. And after that—who knows? I must arrange things some way, so that I can have you all to myself.

Please take care of that cold. I know what these long jumps mean, getting up at daybreak—piling out at some strange town in the middle of the night all kinds of weather—I don't wonder you hate it, and want to get back, and you shall, before long. Just leave it to me.

Well—no more now. I'm terribly rushed today, but you'll find a letter from me waiting for you at Pittsburgh. As ever

Yours,

Phil.

Saturday

DEAREST: I've just had a talk with Matthews. He read the book last night, and is enthusiastic about it, so I've arranged with him to do the play—a thousand down and the usual royalty terms. Luckily he isn't very busy right now, and promises to have the script ready in thirty days. I control the dramatic rights, of course—got them from Royce, who wrote the book, in your name, so nobody can ever take the part away from you. You'll find the contract enclosed.

I'm writing this at the office—a dirty, wet afternoon, raining cats and dogs. Don't feel like going home. Somehow I have an idea that my wife has heard about—us; though in what way I can't imagine. She hasn't said anything, but—those eyes, forever staring at me across the table! God! Always looking at me as though I'd done something I shouldn't, or failed to do something I should. Accusing, yet never admitting it. When I complain, she says I must have a guilty conscience. I don't believe she has the least appreciation of

all I've done for her. I can't stand it much longer.

I didn't mean, dear, to inflict my domestic troubles on you, but I think you ought to know just how things are at home. It isn't that I blame her for anything—she's done her best, I guess; but sometimes I think she'd be glad to leave me. There are women like that. God knows what she wants, I don't. It isn't money. I give her enough—more than enough—and all I ask in return is that she make me comfortable. A man has a right to that, I think. And she has a charming home, and the youngsters—you'd think it would be enough to satisfy any woman—any ordinary woman, that is. I'm not speaking of the exceptional ones, like you. But it doesn't—her. Not that she complains. I only wish she did. Just that dull, accusing stare, and—silence. Enough to drive a man mad. I don't know a worse fate than being bored to death. If I only had you! Of course, it isn't her fault that she hasn't your temperament, your imagination. But the eternally placid, cowlike way she takes things gets on my nerves so at times that I feel like shouting—"My God, woman, doesn't *anything* make you feel?" She wasn't that way when I married her—seems to have changed a lot the past few years. I can't imagine what's come over her.

Thank God your cold is no worse. Of course you ought to have a heavier coat, and I'm enclosing a check for you to get it with—a good one. *Do* take care of yourself, sweetheart, for my sake.

Love,

Phil

Tuesday

YES, DEAR—I got yours from Cleveland. Don't worry about Mrs. H—. She can't have found out anything definite, and even if she has, what difference does it make? We have each other—always—nothing else matters.

I hope you've seen a doctor, as I asked you to. You can't afford to run any risks this weather, with so much

pneumonia about. I wish I were there to doctor you—I bet I'd have you well in a hurry.

I'm not feeling so fit myself today, but the trouble is mental, I guess, rather than physical. Somehow—perhaps because I miss you so—things seem especially unpleasant at home. Not that we have any quarrels, or things like that. Just a dull, gloomy silence that gets on my nerves more than the worst sort of an explosion.

When I got home yesterday afternoon I found her sitting on the floor in the attic, looking over some old sketches—she used to paint a little, you know, before we were married. I think she had been crying, too—the Lord knows what about. She put the things back in the trunk, when I came in, and pretended she'd been looking for some paints to amuse the children with. But it wasn't that. I think she has an idea she really might have done something with her painting. Women are so apt to confuse a little facility with real talent and ability. There's a little rotter named Ames, an illustrator—did some covers for us last year—who hangs about at times, while I'm at the office. Shouldn't be surprised if he'd been talking to her—getting her dissatisfied. He's just the sort would enjoy making trouble between a man and his wife. Not real trouble. He isn't the kind of a man you could be jealous of—but I don't doubt he's filled her up with a lot of notions about a career. You know the type. She asked me at breakfast this morning if I would mind letting her have a chance at the illustrations for the new Mafy Wilcox book we're bringing out in the spring. Said she thought she could do them. I told her I'd think it over. As though a man could afford to jeopardize his business affairs for the sake of a silly whim like that!

It's rotten, I suppose, for me to say such things—I wouldn't, of course, to anyone but you. And after all, why not be honest? I mean to be, always, dear, so far as you are concerned. And I want you to realize just what I'm up

against, and how greatly I need you in these trying times.

Of course I suppose I do her an injustice, in a way. She's been pretty loyal, and has never nagged me the way some wives do. Even when I've gotten mixed up with other women. Yes—I've broken loose once or twice, in the past, trying to find the real mate I've at last found in you. She was very decent about it, I'll admit. Some women would have raised the roof. But while she didn't threaten to make any trouble, I don't believe she's ever really forgiven me, in her heart. I can see, in her eyes, all sorts of things she doesn't say. And I feel a bit guilty, too, at times, even though I know that the basic fault is hers—that if she had the intellect, the imagination, the charm, to hold me, as you do, I'd never have wanted other women.

As for her being jealous—I don't know. It's hard to tell, with these silent women. She may be, although she's never shown it, at least not lately. There was a time, when we were first married, when she might have been, but, as I've told you, she's changed a lot since then. Seems sort of quiet, dull, almost as if she were discouraged, though what about I don't know. Good Lord—if a man allowed himself to feel discouraged whenever things went wrong he'd be in the dumps most of the time. Take myself, for instance, not seeing you, and working, planning, twelve hours a day running my business, just to give her a home she doesn't appreciate. No bed of roses, I can tell you. Hardly a day but what something goes wrong.

Take the matter of those stock investments I told you about—the ones I expect to supply the money for our play—they're on my mind continually, and when things look bad, as they do right now, I have to keep on smiling just the same. But don't worry, dear. The market is due for a rise any day now. And Matthews is making splendid progress with the dramatization. He's let me see the first act, and it's corking. You can't fail to make a big

hit in the part, with your ability, your looks. I'll send the completed manuscript on to you as soon as it's ready—probably at St. Louis. St. Louis—it seems a million miles away! If you were only in Albany, or Buffalo, I'd run up for the week end with you. It's some consolation, anyway, to know that you aren't going to the Coast. And of course when the new play is done, and we have the money ready, you can hand in your notice and be back in New York in a couple of weeks. I'll keep you posted.

Ever your devoted

Phil

Saturday

DEAR CARL: Why do you keep asking me whether my wife is jealous? It makes no difference, and, anyway, I don't think she is. As a matter of fact, she's not very well—doesn't seem interested in anything. Nervous, she says, although I don't believe she has a nerve in her body, she's so quiet. What she needs is a tonic, and to get out and play golf, the way most of her friends do, instead of sitting about making useless sketches. Yes, she's got her paints and things out—that fellow Ames is responsible, I guess—and I think she has some idea of doing the illustrations for that Mary Wilcox book, after all, and then submitting them to me. At least she seemed to have, a couple of weeks ago. I haven't heard anything about it, of late. Just goes about the house like a ghost, with nothing to say but "yes" and "no." The Lord deliver me from these morose women! You can imagine how she gets on my nerves. I've taken to dining at the club here, lately, and playing poker with some of the boys, just to get a change of scene. No use sitting around the house evening after evening, yawning over the newspapers. Men who handle big affairs, do big things, need relaxation of some sort. I don't pose as an angel, but I think I've done my part—taken care of my family first—never let them want for anything. After that, a man has the right to play a little. But my

playing is innocent enough, dear girl—it couldn't be anything else, now that I have you.

I loved your letter from Cincinnati. Of course your notices were good. *All* the critics aren't fools. You're going to show them, before long—realize your ambitions—*our* ambitions—right here on Broadway. Matthews has promised the completed script of the play next week. I know you're going to be mad about it.

I'm sending the things you spoke of. The fur is a beauty, I think—although not half good enough—for you. Let me know how you like it. And *do* write oftener, dear. Life is very gloomy without you, these December days, and I want you here, in my arms, more than I can ever tell you. With all my love—

Phil

Wednesday

DEAR HEART: Here is the manuscript of the play—*your* play, for I'm making you a Christmas present of it. Read it at once, and let me know what you think. The big scene at the end of the third act would make *any* play, Matthews says, and *how* you will do it! I can hear the applause now.

I'm sorry to say stocks haven't gone up. We may have to wait a bit for the money, but that can't be helped. I'd take it out of the business, but that hasn't been good, either. People don't seem to be buying books. And thirty thousand is a good deal of money.

You ask how matters are at home. They couldn't be worse. Mrs. H— isn't well. Coughs quite a lot, and refuses to see a doctor. Says there's nothing the matter with her—that she just has a slight cold. I've been trying to get her to go away—offered her a trip to Bermuda, or Florida, but she won't go. Didn't seem interested, in spite of the sacrifices I'd have to make to provide the money—said she felt it her duty to stay at home on account of the children. She's acting very queerly. Several times, I find, she's been seen lunching with that little beggar, Ames.

He came in to dinner last night, and I asked him about it, point blank.

"What have you and Mrs. Hoyt been doing together up in town?" I said.

He was rather taken aback at this, but my wife didn't seem disturbed in the least.

"Mr. Ames has been kind enough to let me come to his studio," she said. "It has helped me a lot, just to watch him work."

I didn't pursue the subject then, but Ames came back to it over our cigars.

"Your wife has a great deal of talent, Hoyt," he sputtered. "You ought to give her a chance to develop it. Can't you see she's wasted, living the sort of life she does? Why, man, it's killing her!"

"I don't know what you mean," I told him. "Mrs. Hoyt has everything she wants—plenty of money, a charming home, children. What's killing her, I'd like to know?"

He didn't make any reply to this at first. Then he began to sputter again:

"Hasn't it ever occurred to you that a woman may have ambitions as well as a man? That three meals a day and a comfortable home might not satisfy her?"

I lost my patience at this.

"What the devil does she want?" I asked.

"Work. Something to do."

"Something to do? My dear fellow—running a house—taking care of two growing children, is a whole lot to do. Most women complain it's too much. Does she want to give it up? She hasn't said so to me!"

"Not that. She wouldn't, more's the pity. But don't you see she's wasting herself, doing drudgery that others might do for her—not having any outlet for the bigger things she might do?"

"Drudgery! You're crazy! She has three servants. If that isn't enough I'll get her another. I don't see what you've got to do with it, anyway!" The man's impertinence annoyed me.

"I haven't anything to do with it, Hoyt. That's true. But I admire your wife a lot, and I—well, I'm sorry for

her. She needs an outlet for her talents, her ambitions. I've tried to encourage her, but after all you are the one who should do that. Why don't you let her try the illustrations for one of your books? Give her a chance. I've seen her sketches, and I know she has ability—lots of it. The mere effort of trying would help her—cheer her up."

"All right. I've no objections. She understands that. But you realize as well as I do that she hasn't had the training—the experience, to do really important work. It takes years of study—effort. If she'd wanted an artistic career she never should have married. You mean well, Ames, but I wonder if it has ever occurred to you that by encouraging her with false hopes at this late date you may be doing her a great injury? Her home, her children, used to satisfy her. You make her dissatisfied with them. Make her believe she can do big things. Suppose she can't? Suppose she tries and fails? Then where will she be? Wretched. I believe in encouraging talent wherever I find it, but I don't believe in encouraging women who have other duties and responsibilities to run after will-o'-the-wisps. It only makes them miserable. I don't want to seem disagreeable, Ames, but I wish you'd let my wife alone. She's been a different woman ever since you started in to talk to her. You've done her a lot of harm."

He hadn't anything to say to that, and just then my wife came in and we sat around talking about nothing for a couple of hours—one of those deadly interminable evenings. I was glad when he left.

Mrs. H— seemed more gloomy than ever after he'd gone, and I tried to cheer her up.

"If you want to try a picture or two for our next children's book," I said, "I'll bring down the manuscript. I let Hibben have the last one. He's a big man, you know—virile, original."

"Thank you," she said. That was all. Can you wonder she gets on my

nerves? I'd give anything in the world to see you right now. I'm desperate. But things will be different when we get the play on. I'll *make* them so.

Yours,

Phil

Monday

DEAREST GIRL: I'm overjoyed that you like the play so much. I knew you would. We are going to make a fortune out of it, and what's more, make you a star. My star—the guiding star of my life.

I haven't cleaned up yet in that stock deal, but things look better this week. Don't be impatient, dear. I'll wire you the moment I have everything arranged. We ought to start rehearsals in February at the latest. And open in March—better then than now, the way the season's going. Eight shows closed last week, I hear. And business in general hasn't been any too good. If I only had you here to cheer me up! I enclose the check, and with it all my love.

Yours,

Phil

P. S. I've put a lot more money in that stock. We only need a five-point rise now to give us the profit we want, instead of ten. I hope to have good news for you before the end of the week.

Saturday

DEAR. Nothing definite yet. I haven't time for more than a short note. You might have written from Chicago. I expected it. Thank God, you are on your way home! I'll have a letter at Buffalo to meet you. And when you get to Albany the following week I'll be up to see you, of course.

Another scene last night. About money matters, strangely enough. Mrs. H— began to question me about some money of hers I've been handling. I wonder what started that? I've put it in the market, of course. It's not important, however; just a temporary arrangement. Everything will be all right next week.

I don't see the need of it, but I'm

sending you the assignment of the Matthews contract you asked for, so the play is absolutely yours. Of course I might drop dead or something, but I hope not, as long as I have you, and our future to look forward to. I've been thinking things over, and it seems to me it would be best for Mrs. H—to arrange for a divorce, so that you and I can be married as soon as possible. Things can't go on like this.

Yours,

Phil

Tuesday

DEAR: I've bad news for you—rotten bad news. I told you I'd doubled up on my stock holdings, and cut down my margins, too—to get a profit of thirty thousand, quick, for the production. Well, the market had a sudden slump—and I'm wiped out. Not my business, of course—that's going on—but all the money I had invested on account of the play. I may be able to raise the amount some other way later on, but I'm flat, right now. Of course I could turn the production over to others, but I don't want to do that. We must do this thing together.

I'm terribly blue. But I know you will understand. It only means delay. Of course I've lost a lot of money—more than I like to think about—but so long as we love each other it doesn't matter. I'll write again tomorrow. I haven't been home for three nights—couldn't bear it—I may never go there again.

Phil

Thursday

OLGA DEAR: I'm coming to you Saturday. We'll have to talk things over. My affairs are worse than I thought. I don't mean I'm absolutely broke, but things are pretty bad. I feel as though I'd like to sell out everything and go away with you for a year. Then, after the divorce, and our marriage, we'd come back and put this play on together. Make our fortunes out of it. I know a number of men would be glad to come in with me. But I can't talk this over by letter. I'll be with

you on Saturday. Until then, remember that nothing matters, so long as we love each other.

Yours,

Phil

P. S. Until Saturday, dear, and you'd better send in your notice, for I don't mean to leave you again, ever.

* * * * *

HE WOMAN in the chair dropped the last letter into her lap and laughed. It was not a pleasant laugh; there was no mirth in it. She took a cigarette from the box at her elbow and lighting it, gazed for a long time at the snowflakes, whirling noiselessly against the window panes. Suddenly she sprang to her feet, ground the half-smoked cigarette into an ash tray, and going to the desk against the wall began to write. The sheer silk wrapper she wore slipped from one shoulder, revealing the firm, round flesh, pale gold in the amber light of the desk lamp. Her pen flew swiftly, almost viciously, over the white surface of the paper. The clock chimed the hour of four.

A gentle tapping at the door aroused her. With a frown of annoyance about her closely set eyes, she opened it. A woman stood on the threshold—a woman of thirty, not without a certain pale, tragic beauty. She stared at the girl before her with melancholy eyes.

"Are you Miss Vanness?" she asked.

"Yes." The answer was curt, questioning. "What do you want?"

"I am Mrs. Hoyt. I want to talk to you." She took a step into the room.

"But—I—" The younger woman's composure was for the moment shaken. "How did you get up here? You had no right—"

"I told the man at the desk that I was a friend of yours—that you expected me. I couldn't have come up, otherwise. I felt I must see you. Oh"—she sank into a chair—"please don't think I've come to make a scene! I just want to talk to you quietly for a few moments—about—about Phil."

The girl in the kimono drew it closely

about her, shut the door. Her lips became a thin scarlet line.

"Why should you want to talk about your husband—to me?"

"Don't let's pretend. It's so much easier to be honest. I want to talk about him to you because you are the woman he thinks himself in love with. I've known of it for some time. But I haven't said anything—I supposed he'd get tired of you, the way he has of all the others—"

"Others!" The girl in the kimono frowned.

"Yes. There have been a good many. Phil is like that. But he may really care—about you. I don't know. That's why I took the trouble to come and see you. Oh—I'm not going to ask you to give him up. But I thought you ought to know the facts. Would you mind listening for a few moments?"

"No." The younger woman lit a cigarette. A hard smile had replaced her frown. "Your husband is nothing to me, but if it will do you any good to talk about him, why—go ahead!"

"Thank you. And perhaps it isn't Phil I want to talk about so much as it is myself. I don't doubt you have a picture of me, through his eyes—not a very correct picture—one-sided, I imagine—and there may be another side—there always is, don't you think?"

The girl yawned.

"I suppose so," she said. "Most men are liars."

"Perhaps they are. If he had given me a picture of you, for instance, it probably would not have been—correct. Do you know"—she leaned forward eagerly in her seat—"can you believe that I envy you?"

"Envy me?" The girl laughed scornfully. "Envy me, playing a small part in a road show—making three hundred mile jumps in all kinds of weather—living at rotten hotels, and wishing I had a comfortable apartment in New York—the way other women have. Envy me?" she shuddered. "You're crazy!"

The woman opposite her shook her head.

"I don't mean that I envy you those things," she said. "But your freedom—yes. You see, when I was married, and before—I—I had ambitions, too. I thought I could paint—illustrate books—do things like that. People told me I could. Perhaps they were right. I think they were. When I married Phil, I had a vague idea that I would keep it up. He said so, too. Thought I could illustrate some of the books he published. I meant to try, but—the children came, and the years slipped by, and—well—I just didn't. I had some money, too—enough to have gone abroad—studied. But Phil needed it in his business, he said, so I let him have it. It was my duty to lend it to him, of course. I don't speak of it to belittle him. And I suppose I've gotten it back in a way, for I've had a good home all these years, and—comfort." She gazed about the room with tired eyes. "It wasn't what I wanted. I wanted to do things. To be myself, the way you are. Even in a little room like this. Of course, people would say I'd had a husband's love—but I haven't had that, really. Not as I thought I would have it. Phil has lived his own life—women—his clubs—his men friends. I haven't seen much of him. And yet, whenever I've tried to have men friends—men who could have helped me—he's been suspicious, made things unpleasant—did all he could to discourage me. I suppose you wonder why I haven't left him, but"—she made a tragic little gesture—"you see, there were the children. And through them, and my love for him—for I suppose I do love him even yet—I've gone on—let myself be crushed—beaten—until I haven't any fight left in me. Except for the two boys.

"It's on their account that I came to see you. If Phil really loves you—wants to marry you, I'll give him a divorce. I'd be almost glad to, so far as I am concerned, for I'm tired, very tired of it all. But I've got to consider the children. It would be pretty bad for them not to have a father. People always talk about a mother's love, but I think, in the ten or twelve years my

boys have ahead of them, before they go out into the world, it is a father's love, more than a mother's, that they need. And Phil does love his children, in spite of the way he's acted, and I know that if he were to leave them, and marry you, he would regret it, and I don't believe that you'd either of you be happy.

"So I thought I'd come to you and tell you about them, and about myself, too, and the ambitions I once had—just as you have now. Phil won't make you a good husband. He's too selfish for that. You'd never be happy with him—not for long. He'd crush the ambition out of you as he has out of me, and in the end you'd regret it. But of course that's your affair—and his. If you insist on going ahead, I'll do anything I can to help out. There needn't be any scandal. We'll arrange things quietly. I won't ask for any alimony, if he will give me back the money I put into the business. As for the children, he must provide for them, of course. Then, if it isn't too late, I'll try to do the things I've always wanted to do—to have the freedom you have—the chance to make good—to succeed. I haven't been very well of late—worrying about things, you know—and perhaps that's why I seem sort of down-broken. As though all the courage had gone out of me." She laughed bitterly. "But if I had a rest I'd be different. The effort of doing new things—seeing new people—would bring me back to the way I was, once. I'm terribly tired of the dull treadmill of life. The struggle with servants—the endless repetition—paying bills, ordering meals, doing and undoing the same things, day after day, year after year—just going round and round in a circle." She straightened her shoulders with a sudden effort, shook her head as though to clear her vision. "But it's my duty, I suppose, to stand by him, now that he's in trouble. I've made myself think that so long, I've come to believe it. And so, no matter how I may feel, I'd be glad if you'd send him back on the boys' account. Will you? I haven't

seen him for several days, but from some things he's said I know that matters have got to be decided, one way or the other, at once." She fumbled with her gloves.

The girl rose. There was a contemptuous smile on her handsome face.

"You might have spared yourself the trip up here," she said. "I've just finished writing your husband a letter. Here it is." She took the sheets from the desk and held them out. "Read it."

The elder woman took the letter diffidently. Her fingers trembled as she read:

MY DEAR PHIL: Your letter came this morning. I'm terribly sorry to hear that things are going badly with you, and hope they'll be better soon. About my play, it's unfortunate you won't be able to put it on—I've been looking forward to the production for months—but I've had a couple of other offers, so I guess I'd better accept one of them. After all, you can't expect me to sacrifice my career, just because you've had bad luck.

Please don't come up here on Saturday. It won't do any good. I shouldn't think of going away with you—it's absurd. I've got my work, my future to think of.

We've made a mistake, I guess, but it's just as well we found it out before it was too late. So don't come, *please*. I hate scenes. It's much nicer to say good-by this way—and be good friends. Don't worry about the play. Matthews, the author, can get it put on for me. He told me so, in Chicago. I didn't write you, did I, that he'd been out there to see me? So everything will be all right.

Call me up sometime, when I'm back in town. I'll always be glad to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Olga

THE WOMAN in the chair rose, handed back the letter.

"You—you wrote that before I came?" she asked.

"Yes. Are you satisfied now?"

Her companion gave a wistful glance about the room.

"I don't know," she said. "I suppose I ought to be. It's a matter of duty. But"—she laughed rather bitterly—"I had my dreams, too. Good day." Her shoulders drooped a trifle, as she went out, in spite of her efforts to straighten them.

The girl in the kimono gave a light, scornful laugh as she closed the door. Then she went to the telephone and put in a long-distance call. During the minutes that she was waiting, she took the letters she had been reading and tearing them into ragged strips, tossed them one by one into the wastebasket.

"Hello," she said, when the telephone bell at last rang. "I want Mr. Matthews's apartment. Oh—is that you, Clifford? This is Olga. Fine—how are you? Yes—I got your letter, and it's all right about your coming up. I've heard from Hoyt. He's clean—down and out. So you can go right ahead with Lipmann about the production. And Cliff—meet me after the matinée, will you, dear? We'll have dinner, and talk things over. Of course I do, you silly boy. How can you ask, after—Chicago? Yes—and be good. See you tomorrow, dear, about five-thirty. By."

A LADY remains a lady up to the fifth cocktail. After that she is a sight.

A Condensed Guide to a Few of Our More Popular Resorts

By Jay Jarrod

Hot Toddy Springs: All varieties of pleasure on hand—Scotch, rye, brandy, champagne, etc., etc. Will put you in shape for a good, long rest afterward. Perhaps forever.

Jazz Island: Reserve your ring-side table for breakfast. Gaiety sold by the quart. Never a quiet moment.

Gin Beach: One continuous round of cocktails. Breakfast served daily at 5 P. M. Extra charge for dishes not on the wine card.

Syncopatia: Best hotel, The Royal Rip Snorter. A Jazz band on every floor. Dancing waiters and singing bell boys. The night clerk, a whizz at the drum. Guests desiring saxophones will kindly notify the office before daybreak.

Hootchy-Hootch: Home of the "Knockout Fizz." An additional tax on all tea served at tea parties. Guests are requested not to drink up the swimming pool before breakfast.

Synthetica: A haunt of pink elephants and blue giraffes. Gardens of maraschino cherries. Fields of gin daisies. Bushes of jack roses. One long swallow from the moment of arrival till departure.

Juniper Cove: South of the Green River. In direct communication with the three mile limit. Its rum baths particularly recommended.

Guzzlehurst: In the heart of the moonshine belt. Absolutely nothing to do but drink. Ladle you on the train when you leave.

Alcoholia: No closing hours. Grill Room opens at 3 A. M. A special lunch may be drunk daily on the terrace. Ragtime every hour. Famous for its champagne fountains.

Jagville: Stop at the Village (G) in. All rooms fitted with ice boxes and bars. Drinking baskets for outing trips, a specialty. Ring twice for the local bootlegger.



Benediction

By William A. Drake

SLEEP come to you, like arms of one you love
Enfolding you in rest compassionate,
That night long hold you close and fear to move
And never seem to weary of your weight.
Hushing the murmurs of your fretful sleep,
Stilling your sorrows with a rest as deep,
Until you waken to the calm caress
Of her who never knew her weariness.

J Those pajamas! They were blue, and they were silk, and they had Jimmie's name embroidered over the pocket. . . . Jimmie had given them to Pamela, just to be smart, and then he had gone and married Millicent! . . . But Jimmie soon found out that Pamela wasn't the kind of girl it's safe to fool with! . . .

Pamela's Pajamas

By Wilson Collison

JIMMIE GLENDON was walking up and down the length of the dim veranda in nervous anxiety. Now and then he paused to jerk his head round and glance with harried eyes through the broad French windows into the room where they were dancing. Occasionally, he felt bewildered; frequently filled with a burning rage, a tremendous resentment. It was damnably annoying of Pamela, most unsportsmanlike of her to keep him in this ghastly suspense! He had never been anything but nice to her; now why should she want to drive him to such lengths of desperation?

He strode to the railing and leaned over, looking into the moonlit shadows enshrouding the lawn. It was as if he expected some haunting spectre to step out from among the sweet-smelling bushes and point an accusing finger at him. Or perhaps he held a vague notion that his hot-tempered little bride, Millicent, might spring at him from the lawn and fasten her dainty fingers round his throat, choke the life out of him.

The music annoyed him thoroughly. Mrs. Alton had such a fearful love for jazz. But her dances were always splendidly correct and her week-end parties the height of good taste. And such an exclusive set! Jimmie admitted that one should feel proud enough to be admitted to that inner circle.

But eyes in Heaven! Or grinning devils in hell! They must be laughing at him, jeering at him. His opinion of women at this particular moment was distinctly unspeakable. . . .

Really, he ought to hunt out Pamela and give her a sound thrashing, he decided. She deserved it! Because she had promised him that she would appear promptly at nine in a shadowy corner of the veranda and deliver into his eager hands those beastly pajamas! Pajamas which haunted him in his sleep, walked with him in his waking hours, grinned at him out of his wife's eyes over the breakfast coffee, shrieked at him in his bath, howled derisively at him with every rising beat and staccato note of the orchestra playing gaily inside that room. Pamela ought to be damned! . . .

In this moment of mental agony, Jimmie Glendon wished that he had never met Pamela Ardley; he wished that he had never gone to China; he wished fervently that he had never married fiery-tempered little Millicent Martin—and above all, he wished that he had never accepted Mrs. Alton's invitation to spend the week-end on Long Island. Robert Harrington Shelton, that intrepid adventurer and soldier of fortune, had remarked only a few days ago to Jimmie that people always got into pecks of trouble at house-parties on Long Island.

And Jimmie was in trouble! One only had to look at his round face to note that.

HE TOOK out his watch and glanced at it abstractedly. In another hour everyone in Mrs. Alton's house would be retiring for the night. Then Jimmie's jinx would stalk—Pamela in her pajamas!—those gorgeous Chinese silk pajamas which he had brought back from Hong Kong and so foolishly presented to her, the angel's own little devil. . . . Of course, it is safe enough to give a girl pajamas. Jimmie conceded that. But the asinine thing he had done! Had his name worked in silk letters across the dainty little pocket, just over Pam's heart. Curious what silly things imbeciles will do!

So thought Jimmie with a little laugh. Obviously, there was no salvation for him. He was branded, guilty—a witless fool. A man would be clever to commit a murder and leave his name and address on the body. Jimmie had been ingenious to give Pam a beautiful little weapon with which to annihilate his future comfort and happiness with Millicent. She had only to show those pajamas to Millicent to place Jimmie in the Alimony Club and to provide the newspapers with another husband-gone-wrong story. . . .

Where was the little devil? Jimmie bit his underlip and prayed devoutly that they'd end that fox-trot or kill the saxophone player. The moaning of that instrument reminded him of a soul in agony.

II

SOMEONE was coming across the smooth lawn, a green, velvety blanket under the moon. Jimmie looked quickly into the gloom, but saw only a tall, dark shadow swinging across toward the veranda.

It was a man. Jimmie was looking distractedly for an imp of a girl with a willowy, supple figure that seemed to drive men wild—or to give her pajamas.

The dark, sinister figure was in fact

Robert Harrington Shelton. He came up the veranda steps with his accustomed vigor. He was smoking a cigarette and appeared painfully at ease with the world and the wild life bursting raucously about him.

Jimmie huddled back in the shadows and watched the man speculatively. Shelton had a superior air of power, a touch of the mad adventurer, the swing of the old-time knight. He was so damnably unconscious of his own good looks, Jimmie thought. Tall and slender, with magnificent shoulders, the head of a Greek god, the eyes of a dreamer, the jaw of a fighter, the precise elegance of a gentleman—

Jimmie sneezed. Shelton turned slowly and looked in his direction. Jimmie smiled faintly and called to him.

"A great night, Jimmie," said Shelton in his husky baritone. It was said that Shelton had been shot in the throat during an adventure in Africa, thus giving his voice that strange, musically weird quality which invariably startled people the first time they heard him speak.

"It's a hell of a night!" Jimmie uttered hoarsely; and flung himself down into a large wicker chair.

Shelton walked toward him; sat down on the veranda railing smoking, surveying Jimmie with half-veiled eyes—an impressive, a splendid figure silhouetted in the moonlight.

"What's wrong with your wife now?" he inquired in an amused voice.

"God knows," said Jimmie savagely. "I don't. Haven't seen her for more than an hour. . . . Why aren't you dancing?"

"Stupid pastime," Shelton answered, flicking the ash from his cigarette. "You know, Jimmie, women are getting more impossible every day."

"Crazy!" Jimmie agreed, with a fierce sweep of his hand. "We gave them Heaven and they took hell in the bargain."

"Are you suffering?" asked Shelton, with a laugh. "Or have you only fallen in love with another woman?"

"Suffering," Jimmie admitted tersely. There was a long pause, a deep silence. The music drifted through the windows again, this time less blatantly—a dreamily seductive waltz.

Jimmie shook his head wearily. He felt that he had let down frightfully in the last hour.

"Nice party," Shelton murmured, gazing across the lawn with somber eyes.

"It might be," returned Jimmie disconsolately, "if it weren't for the conditions." That horrible pajama-doom was hanging again suspended before his eyes—a grinning devil, a monument to his stupidity. "Seems to me you're tramping it alone, Shelton." Somehow, Jimmie felt the need of continual conversation to distract his mind from that infernal spectre. "Especially for a man who's as sought after by women as you are."

Shelton swung round deliberately and looked at Jimmie. His eyes held an amused light.

"Oh, I don't get on with women," he said, with a ghost of a smile on his lips.

"Good Lord!" whispered Jimmie. "If I had your flair and the color of romance back of me that you have, I'd be the world's greatest lover."

Shelton laughed. He shrugged. He tossed his cigarette over the railing. Inhaled a long breath of air. Puckered his brows a little. Reached into his pocket and took out a handsome diamond and platinum watch of rarest pattern. He glanced at it in the moonlight, rather abstractedly.

"I demand too much of women," he explained, with the ingeniousness of the perfect connoisseur. "Beauty, good sense, a touch of the romantic—and above all, a devilish sense of humor."

"You should have married my wife for the sense of humor," Jimmie uttered acridly. "Staying all night?"

"No, I'm sailing tomorrow," Shelton answered.

"Sailing where?" Jimmie asked politely.

"Algiers," said Shelton. "Going into the Sahara with an expedition."

"I wish I could go!" Jimmie shot

out viciously. "Lucky dog."

Shelton smiled his enigmatic smile. He was toying with an oddly shaped ring on his little finger.

"You know," he said casually, "that's an awfully nice swimming pool Mrs. Alton has in the Roman garden."

"Great," agreed Jimmie, stealing a furtive glance through the windows into the room beyond. All he saw was the mad whirl of the dancers.

"By the way," Shelton continued, in the same irrelevant tone, "who's the slender little girl with the bronze hair, black eyes and ivory skin?"

Jimmie rose from his chair. He felt suddenly and gleefully triumphant. Maliciously contented.

"Oh, that," said he, with a vague smile. "That's Pamela Ardley. Everyone's in love with her, but she won't marry—she's got a lot of money. Beautiful girl, isn't she?"

"Adorably perfect," murmured Shelton, in an emotionless voice. "I just pulled her out of the swimming pool in the Roman garden. Rather more than thirty minutes ago, I should say. I thought she was drowning, but she informed me she was only singing. Curious thing—she wore only a pretty suit of extraordinarily odd pajamas—blue silk, I think—and they did show her off to advantage."

Jimmie uttered a choking gasp. He turned a pasty white. Then he leaped forward and caught Shelton's arm.

"You idiot!" he cried sibilantly. "Why didn't you pull them off her?"

"Because," answered Shelton, with an indefinite smile, "it would have left the lady in such an Eve-like condition—and nature is never so unattractive as when unadorned."

And at this precise moment, Pamela Ardley stepped through the French windows wearing an exquisitely daring evening gown of peacock blue. . . .

III

TWENTY minutes before Pamela stepped through those French windows, she stood before a long mirror in Mrs. Alton's boudoir and surveyed her-



self with approving eyes. She wore a dainty hand-made French chemise of sheerest purple silk; her silk-shod legs were superbly trim and alluring; her throat and shoulders and arms gleamed marble-white under the soft glow of the lamp upon the dressing table.

She smiled at her own vivid reflection in the mirror. She turned her head and glanced across the room at a pair of damp pajamas, blue silk, hanging over the back of the chair. She laughed deliciously, fairly trilled in her keen delight. Well, she had made Robert Harrington Shelton notice her. That was something. Dolly Alton had warned her in the very beginning that Mr. Shelton would be cruelly polite,

possibly dance with her, inquire as to her own particular interest in life, look at her with ineffably unfathomable eyes, which were gray—and promptly dismiss her from his mind.

Dismissed, indeed! She had given that glorified gentleman something to think about.

She recalled with flamboyant amusement his look of amazement as he leaned over the side of the pool to pull her out. She thrilled at the thought. The man's fingers were like iron. She had fairly shot up into dismaying space, as though she were a feather.

She laughed. She finished her deft touching of rouge with nimble fingers. She looked over her shoulder at the

pajamas. She shrugged. No, she wouldn't give them back to Jimmie just yet. She'd teach him a lesson—prod him to desperation. Jimmie was such a futile young man.

She ran across and caught up the pajamas. She'd carry them to the room Mrs. Alton had allotted her for the night—a very pretty little room on the front of the house, overlooking the veranda roof. And her gown was in that room, too.

She went swiftly to the door, pajamas in hand. She opened the door a crack and peeped out into the hall. It was only faintly lighted. Of course there'd be no one to see her. Everyone was downstairs dancing. She could hear the sound of the music up here.

She stepped through the door into the hall. It was a very long hall. Pamela tiptoed quickly toward her own door, precisely half way down the length of the hall. She was in a gorgeously gay mood. . . . To get into her peacock-blue gown. To go downstairs and deliberately seek out Mr. Shelton. To make him dance with her. . . .

A door opened suddenly. A dark, sinister figure stepped without haste into the hall. It was a man in evening clothes. He was smoking a cigarette. The pungent odor of the uncommon tobacco filled the hall.

Pamela uttered a stifled gasp. She never screamed. She had almost reached her door—but not quite. She flashed like a bewitching rocket across the man's startled vision. An intoxicating odor of perfume, the enticing ripple of a silken undergarment, the twinkle of two perfect legs, a pair of brilliant black eyes, the ivory whiteness of an exquisitely proportioned breast. . . .

"Adorable!" murmured Robert Harrington Shelton in his husky baritone. "A memory that will linger with me forever. I beg your pardon." He turned his back squarely, with calm deliberation, and walked without apparent haste to the end of the hall.

"Oh!" echoed Pamela, her voice dying away in a discouraged little gur-

gle. She reached for the knob of the door; turned it with a firm grip; flung open the door, fairly popped in and slammed it breathlessly.

She leaned against the door; a bit of color flamed in her cheeks; her eyes were liquid pools of light.

She hurled the pajamas across the room. Mad thoughts went darting through her brain. Then she laughed. Laughter is sometimes the explosion of taut nerves.

She was standing in the dark. Across the room, she saw the moonlight streaming in through the windows. Somehow, she felt thankful for this gracious dimness.

She walked across the room. The windows were open. She looked out. A silver sheen of moonlight lay upon the gray asbestos shingles of the roof. Outside, the night was fairly singing.

She drew in her breath; caught her underlip in her teeth and frowned a little. A tall, dark figure was moving slowly across the lawn, away from the house. She saw the intermittent glow on the end of a cigarette.

It occurred to her that the man was stopping now and then, swinging round, looking back. She wondered, with a sudden smile, if he were looking up at her windows—looking straight into her eyes without being conscious of it.

She stepped back from the window and pulled the white shades down. Her figure merged into the darkness of the room.

She ran across to the night-table beside the bed and snapped on the silk-shaded lamp. Then she saw Jimmie's pajamas lying on the floor. She went over and caught them up; tossed them onto the foot of the bed and moved over to the dressing table.

She gasped. She stepped back. Then she leaned forward again. There was a photograph in a gold frame on the dressing table. And she had placed no photographs there at all! . . .

She caught the frame up swiftly, a little eagerly. It was exceedingly heavy, an odd, a very extraordinarily carved

frame it was—magnificent. . . . She turned it over. Women invariably attempt to discover the quality of a new or a strange article when it comes into their possession. And Pamela was every inch a woman.

She found the mark of quality; a tiny stamping, denoting eighteen karat gold.

Pamela turned the handsome frame over in her hands again. She looked long at the photograph. Robert Harrington Shelton, dressed in white linen breeches, heavy boots, a solar helmet—a gun across his knees, sitting on the back of a huge, dead tiger. And the man was as magnificent as the gold frame.

She read an inscription penned in white ink at the bottom of the picture. "Tigers—and tigresses I have tamed." That was all. It was enough.

"Oh," murmured Pamela. "The supreme egotism of the man. And he's been in my room!"

Then she placed the gold frame in a fitting position on the dressing table. She found her peacock-blue gown. She got into it—not hastily nor carelessly, but with as much attention and discretion as she had ever employed—when dressing for a purpose.

She walked to the door. Pamela had a strange little rolling of the hips when she walked. It was not studied. It was beautifully graceful, superbly and unconsciously sensual.

She glanced back at the gold frame. Then she smiled the age-old, enigmatic smile of her sex—the woman in search of conquest. And she went downstairs, not to have a cocktail, but to smoke a cigarette.

IV

PAMELA felt very young, beautiful and wholly invincible as she stood there with her back to the windows. Jimmie was staring at her, undeniably bewildered. Robert Harrington Shelton was looking at her a little critically, she fancied—but with the ghost of a

smile flitting across his rather grim face, tanned by African sun and winds.

She turned her head gravely and glanced back into the room. She felt that it would take time for Jimmie to regain his faculties, his stunned power of speech. Then, too, she took a keen delight in turning her head that way: her profile was so exquisitely, so faultlessly chiselled in silhouette.

She knew instinctively that Jimmie was trying to speak. She imagined his lips moving soundlessly. She felt like tossing herself into a heap upon the veranda floor, to burst and roll in laughter.

"Good Lord, Pam!" Jimmie exclaimed, in a subdued, far-away voice. "Where have you been all evening?"

"Oh, running about," said Pamela coolly. She moved toward the two men and Jimmie seemed to recede in horror. Shelton sat motionless on the veranda railing, smoking one of those deliciously pungent cigarettes. "I'm not dancing at all. It's rather warm."

Jimmie made a sudden, nervous gesture with his hand, indicating Shelton. "You've met Mr. Shelton?"

"Oh, yes," Pamela smiled and moved toward him. She was so gloriously calm, so imposingly elegant. "Greetings again, Mr. Shelton—I liked your tiger immensely." She proffered her slim, cool hand.

"Indeed?" said Shelton. He had risen. He took her hand in his strong fingers, squeezing it a little. It was the merest squeeze, but it gave Pamela an odd sensation. The man was electric—the very touch of his hand stirred strange emotions within her.

"I think you've seen me in all my moods now," she said whimsically.

"But one," smiled Shelton, a humorous twinkle in his eyes. "And that one must be the very incarnation of the devil's own lure."

"Do you hunt as you talk?" she asked suddenly, conscious that a flame of riotous color had mounted to her cheeks. The man's calm assurance, his quiet dignity were maddening. Pamela

felt that he could say almost anything to a woman and take the sting out of it by the smile in his wide, gray eyes, with his remarkable poise, his unbroken confidence in his ability to confound and perplex.

Jimmie had shifted round a bit and had inadvertently bumped against a chair. It made a sharp, scraping sound which startled Pamela. She looked at Jimmie quickly. She had quite forgotten him. And she had never been so annoyed by any man as she was at this moment by Jimmie Glendon. She had been as one hypnotized, in a trance, fascinated by the strange, the great charm of Sheldon. Or was it charm? Perhaps his superior knowledge of the world, of women, of an adventuresome life that she had never known. . . .

"Will you smoke?" he asked. Pamela saw his long, slender fingers wound round a heavy metal cigarette case. It was unlike any cigarette case she had ever seen; it glinted dully under the shaft of moonlight which fell across it and across Sheldon's head. The man possessed nothing, did nothing, said nothing that marked the ordinary, the commonplace man.

"Thanks," she said, with a little smile. And extracted one of the brown tubes from the case. She placed it between her red lips and leaned forward to the match he lighted.

In the sputtering glow, she looked him directly in the eyes. And before the match burned down and snapped out, her own glance wavered and fell. His eyes were so keen, so penetrating, so soul-searching. . . . He was picturesque, standing there against the veranda railing; he had about him that peculiar and elusive element of romance which is given to so few men in this prosaic world.

"Pam," said Jimmie suddenly, from out of the shadows, "I'd like to talk with you if you don't mind."

She turned her head slightly, looked at Jimmie with sober eyes; shrugged and murmured: "What is it?"

While Jimmie was searching the innermost recesses of his brain for some

subtle rejoinder, some clever means of taking her out of Sheldon's hearing, the orchestra in the room beyond the French windows began to play a soft, lilting air.

"Will you dance?" asked Shelton, moving away from the veranda railing a bit, toward her.

"I'd rather not—thanks," Pamela murmured, looking up at him. He was a veritable mountain of a man; he towered above her, miles and miles—yet oddly enough, it was so easy to look into his eyes. "If you'd enjoy walking through the garden—"

Shelton gave her his arm. He nodded to Jimmie and excused himself with the easy grace of a man who doesn't really care a great deal about what people think of him.

They walked to the edge of the steps. As they started down, Jimmie called after her lustily:

"I say, Pam, I'd like to talk to you a minute!"

"Oh, behave, Jimmie," she flung back over her shoulder. Then she walked along the path toward the garden, her hand clinging to Sheldon's arm. She moved her head a little, rather gravely, a bit speculatively—and studied another angle of his face.

THEY had gone almost the full length of the path and had reached the entrance to the garden. Shelton hadn't said a word. But Pamela was vitally, intensely conscious of his presence. He was the sort of man who doesn't have to talk to make himself effective.

As they turned into the garden, passing through a cluster of lilac bushes, Pamela caught her heel upon a stone and stumbled. She uttered a little gasp and gripped his arm. She was instantly righted, as simply and as gently as if he had been balancing a walking-stick. Pamela almost cried out in amazement when she clutched his arm. It was as hard and as unyielding as a piece of steel.

They came to a huge stone bench overlooking a tiny artificial pool with

water lilies growing in it. Without a word, Shelton nodded to the seat and Pamela dropped down upon it. He sat down beside her and gave her another cigarette from that odd case. He lighted it; then touched a match to his own.

They smoked in silence for a time. Shelton wasn't looking at her at all. He was leaning forward a bit, his chin cupped in the palm of one hand, gazing into the pool. The moonlight danced gaily in silver ripples upon the surface; the lilies nodded to and fro in the warm breeze.

Pamela was watching his face intently. She was thinking—thinking how many men would have been perfectly mad, gloriously happy to have this opportunity. . . .

He looked at her suddenly. She quickly dropped her glance; and she was once more conscious of that swift rush of color to her face, that peculiar thrill shooting through her.

"I don't think," he said, with a whimsical smile, "that I've ever met you—until tonight. Have I?"

"I'm sure you haven't," she answered. There was a deep silence again. A bullfrog croaked from the shadowy regions of the tiny pool. "What made you place that photograph upon my dressing table?"

He laughed. He turned his head and looked down at her. There were humorous lights in his eyes.

"Because," he said, "I heard what Dottie Alton told you about me—and I wanted to prove that women can be wrong."

"Oh," she uttered. "You did it as a practical sort of joke?"

"No, not exactly." He smiled; for a moment, he fancied that he had seen a light leap into her eyes. "On the contrary, it was only a poor, uninspired way of showing you that I was interested in you."

"Really?" She leaned forward and looked up at him. Her face was bewitching in the moonlight. She had unconsciously crossed her legs; one perfect leg swung free, exposed almost to

her dainty knee. "But you never laid eyes on me—until tonight."

He laughed again. He was looking down at her legs, his dark brows drawn together. Her glance followed his eyes and she was suddenly aware of her creeping gown. She reached down coolly to straighten it, to draw it down over her leg.

"Please don't," he said; and threw out one hand, closing it over hers.

"Why?" she asked, sharply.

"Because," he said, "it's such a perfect bit of nature's handiwork. So few women have pretty legs, you know. They're either too thin or too fleshy, too long or too short—yours are adorably perfect."

Pamela colored again under his quietly appraising eyes. The audacity of the man was wonderful. She felt vaguely that she was no match for him. She could think of no other man that she knew whom she would permit to say things like that. But here was a man who offered no silly badinage, who made no *gauche* remarks, who did exactly what pleased him—and she sat quite immovable, neither drawing his hand away nor censuring him for his presumptuousness. . . .

He removed his hand and cupped his chin in it again, looking at the pool and the moonlight shimmering upon it. Pamela glanced at him searchingly. Her mind was not always accurate, but it was quick. She came to the swift conclusion that he was a man of moods. . . .

"You're a strange man," she murmured at length, tossing her cigarette into the pool where it went out with a faint splutter.

He bent toward her suddenly; he reached out and caught her into his arms. Before she could utter a sound, his lips were against hers in a long kiss that touched her like fire. A great, thrilling gasp went through her; she was conscious that she shivered, then tingled; an unaccountable, a new, an overwhelming emotion flamed within her. For one brief moment she lay in his arms as one hypnotized.

Then, with a stifled little cry of rage, a terrific fury drumming inside her, she leaped to her feet. She was colorless; her black eyes were pin-points of snapping fire; her hands clenched; she stood above him and looked down at him in her fierce anger. She made no sound; her breath seemed to hiss through her teeth as she drew back her lips. She looked for all the world like an enraged tigress, Shelton thought as he watched her, fairly fascinated.

"You think you can do that!" she said, with a strangling little cry. "You fancy you are so clever, so ingenious, Mr. Shelton—you're just another damn fool man!"

A slender white hand darted out like lightning shooting across a Summer sky; a soft palm struck him in the face with a vicious snap.

Shelton closed his eyes and gloried in it—but Pamela didn't know that.

She turned and fled through the garden, along the path leading to the house. And as she ran, the rage died out of her heart and tears welled up into her eyes. No man had ever thrilled her like that in all her life. And she would remember that kiss as long as she lived. . . . But Robert Harrington Shelton was a cad!

V

AT TWO o'clock in the morning, Jimmie Glendon was walking about the lawn furiously smoking a cigarette. And five minutes later, when a door slammed somewhere about the house, which was now almost enshrouded in darkness, he jumped as though he had been shot—and would have run madly toward the road but for the fact that he was still alert enough to realize the futility of it.

He huddled back against a large tree and watched breathlessly for someone to step off the veranda. Someone did. It was Shelton, a light motoring coat flung round him and a jaunty soft hat upon his head. He was smoking a cigarette, too, and as he started across the lawn in the direction of the garage,

he began to whistle blithely. Jimmie looked at him, then quickly shot a glance up at the lighted windows over the veranda roof. He uttered a startled cry. He could have sworn that he'd seen Pamela's face peering round the edge of the drawn shade. . . . But as he looked, the lights in the room went out. Jimmie gave a groan and made a headlong dash after Shelton.

He caught up with him, panting and shaking with nervous eagerness. A great idea had hurtled through his brain. Shelton was a mad adventurer—he didn't give a damn what people said or thought of him. . . . Yes, a brilliant inspiration!

Shelton whirled round and caught Jimmie with a firm grip and almost tossed him off his feet before Jimmie could make himself known. Then Shelton laughed and set Jimmie down with painful abruptness and force.

"What the devil are you doing out here at two o'clock?" he asked.

"Praying," whispered Jimmie. "Where are you going?"

"Back to town," Shelton answered. "I'm cancelling my sailing date—I've found the greatest thing in the world."

Jimmie looked round furtively. He caught Shelton by the arm and raised his round, harried face in the moonlight.

"Listen, Bob," he said, almost shivering in the intensity of his desire to communicate his agony to the other man, "I'm in trouble."

"Now what?" Shelton asked. "Have you killed some woman's husband?"

"No," Jimmie jerked out. "But I'm afraid to go to bed—afraid to go up there and face my wife."

"Oh, I see," Shelton chuckled. "You're afraid she'll be in a bad humor and demand a printed list of your former loves."

"No! Nothing of the sort," Jimmie said, almost tearfully. "Millicent is awfully jealous. She raises horrible rows—you know: shrieks and jumps up and down and tells the world. Pamela Ardley—"

Shelton seized him by the arm and



jerked him toward him with painful violence. His eyes snapped; his lips set viciously. His interest was suddenly and acutely aroused.

"Go on!" he said grimly. And Jimmie was thankful that Shelton wasn't an enemy; the man was as fierce as a warrior ready to battle.

"Four months ago, when I came back from China, I gave Pam a pair of pajamas with my name embroidered on the pocket. There was never anything between us. Stupid of me, but I thought I was being clever, doing something to be proud of. Then I met Millicent and fell in love with her. Stupid, too, wasn't it? . . . I married her. Pam won't give those cursed things back to me. She threatens to show them to Millicent and prove to her that all men are fools. Of course, we know that, don't we? . . . I thought she'd give them back to me to-

night. I was sitting on the veranda about one o'clock when she came running up the steps. She jumped over to me and said, 'Jimmie Glendon, all men are fools and cads and pretenders. I'm going to give you a lesson, and I hope to live long enough to give another gentleman a lesson. I'm going to wear your pajamas tonight and walk into your room when Millicent is there and show them to her. I'm going to be a cat—I'm going to get even with every man I can.' Then she laughed and walked through the window. I thought she was crazy. I never saw her act like that before."

"Ah!" Shelton murmured, and released Jimmie. "The woman is in love." His eyes danced in the moonlight. He smiled. He straightened his shoulders and took a long breath. "Yes?"

"I haven't any nerve, Bob. But I've

got to get those pajamas. It will put me in an awful pickle if she does that—and I'm awfully happy with Millicent when I can keep her quiet. Now look here—" His eyes gleamed wildly; his hands shook; his breath came raspingly. "I'll do anything in the world for you, any time—if you can find a way to take those things away from her before you leave. Anything! Don't you see—you can do it? It won't matter if she raises a howl and Mrs. Alton finds you in her room. But if they found me—good night! And I really can't afford to pay out the alimony. Will you give me a lift? For God's sake, do! You're used to facing wild animals—why not a beautiful woman?"

SHELTON inhaled deeply. He laughed in quiet amusement. Then he stepped back; took off his tweed motoring coat and flung it over Jimmie's arm. After which he carefully removed his jaunty soft hat and placed it upon Jimmie's bare head. He as carefully and as swiftly removed his coat, waistcoat, collar and tie and turned in the neckband of his shirt. He chucked everything into Jimmie's hands.

He caught Jimmie by the arm and started across the lawn toward the house. Jimmie followed dumbly, swaying to and fro under the litter of clothes.

When they reached the veranda, Shelton looked up at the roof with a speculative smile.

"Throw those things on the floor and give me a boost," he advised in a low voice. "After I reach the roof, you get into the house and go to your room. And if the pajamas are still with the lady, your wife will never see them."

In a frenzy of haste and fear Jimmie tossed the clothes onto the veranda floor and, stooping, caught one of Shelton's legs as he directed, and gave all his strength to the upward push. In a flash, Shelton was shinning up the smooth, round veranda pillar with the agility of a cat.

When he had reached the roof, and stood an incongruous and ghostly figure in the moonlight, he waved his hand and

Jimmie made a dash for the French windows and passed through them into the darkness of the room within.

A few seconds later, the butler, stepping onto the veranda to make sure that everything was in order for the night, saw the clothes and took them up. He examined them with a knowing smile and carefully placed them upon a chair, smoothing them out as he laid them down in a neat pile.

Then with a long sigh and another smile, a very discreet smile, the butler stepped through the windows and locked them from the inside. With which he retired, wondering what the world was coming to on Long Island. . . .

VI

NOW that it was all over, Pamela was glad; very glad. She was free of that breathless thrill, that impatience, that strangely hurt feeling. But she was disgusted; deeply disgusted.

She sat on the edge of the bed, crinkled her nose, wriggled her pink toes—and tried to stop thinking. She would go to sleep; she wouldn't even raise the window-shades; she didn't want to see the moonlight. It would remind her too much of that amazing and startlingly sweet moment with Robert Harrington Shelton. The cad!

She jerked into bed and skidded under the light silk coverlet. She caught hold of it and pulled it viciously up to her chin. She lay very still and stared into the darkness. She had quite forgotten Jimmie Glendon and his pajamas; they still hung over the edge of the bed where she had tossed them. . . . But she hadn't forgotten Robert Harrington Shelton.

She suddenly lifted her head and shot a swift glance at the windows overlooking the veranda roof. She was sure that she'd heard a queer crunching sound. She listened. But there was no sound. She shrugged contemptuously; a contempt for her own nervousness, her own weakness, her inexplicable restlessness.

But her mind persisted in flying back

to that stone bench before the little pool with the water lilies nodding in the night wind. . . .

Pamela tossed the silk coverlet from her with a little cry of rage. Her night robe slipped down from one shoulder; she shook her hair about her face and gritted her teeth. Men!

It was a gross error on her part to allow Jimmie Glendon to escape unscathed. He should be made to suffer. And in making him suffer, she would at least be wreaking vengeance upon at least one man.

She leaped from the bed and scurried to the foot of it. She caught up the pajamas and looked at them with venomous eyes. It wasn't too late to parade into the Glendons' room under pretext of borrowing some cold cream from Millicent, and return them to Jimmie under his wife's eye.

And a fraction of a second before she opened the door to carry out her plan, the blind at one of the windows went up with an appalling whirr; a dark, sinister figure in a white shirt stepped into the room. With a convulsive gesture Pamela hurled the silky things in her hand at the intruder. The pajamas settled down over his head with a swishing flap, a dash of perfume and the touch of soft, alluring silk.

Pamela stood motionless, petrified, horrified—a white, marble-like figure in the swift flood of moonlight streaming in through the window. She remained rigid; her helpless fingers closed like a vise round the bedpost; her terrified eyes riveted upon the man before the window. . . .

He had thrown aside the pajamas, then stood for a moment incredulous, breathlessly expectant.

Pamela seemed to be falling into darkness, dismaying darkness. She imagined her heart had stopped. With a short, amazed whispering as she made one frantic spring—struck the bed, slipped hastily under the coverlet—pulled it up and took in her breath with a rasping little gurgle.

She thought her face must be a bluish-purple or a brick-red. And she never

really knew what her first impulse of indignation had been. She only knew that she was fairly choking in her fury, but so utterly helpless—and that the intruder was Robert Harrington Shelton. No woman who'd ever seen him could fail to recognize him, even in the dark.

"The incarnation of the devil's own lure," a voice murmured out of the darkness.

And she fairly hissed, so violent was her rage, "if I had a gun, I'd kill you!"

"I would die willingly—" the voice mocked her. She heard his soft, cautious steps coming toward her. She huddled under the coverlet, clenched her fists, bit her lip.

"How dare you—come into my room—like that!" she said fiercely. "If you don't get out at once, I'll scream—rouse everyone in the house."

"Ah!" said Mr. Shelton softly. "You never screamed in your life." The bed bobbed suddenly; tossed like a small boat in a rough sea. Pamela tried to say something, but words failed her. He was sitting on the edge of the bed. It was so dark she couldn't see him—but she knew that he was looking at her. She sensed the light in his eyes; she was suddenly ashamed of the flame she knew was in her own. . . .

"I came," said Shelton gravely, "to take Jimmie Glendon's pajamas."

"Oh!" uttered Pamela sharply. "I suppose you think you'll get them."

"I know I shall."

"Jimmie—the coward! Knowing your reputation for being an adventurer, a daredevil, a—cad—he sent you up here like that. Oh!"

Shelton smiled. He reached into his hip pocket and drew out his cigarette case; he extracted a cigarette and placed it between his lips. He found his match case.

"You haven't screamed," he admonished, faintly humorous.

"I'm not afraid of you!" Pamela said shortly.

"Ah!" murmured Shelton; and struck the match. The flame leaped up like a tiny rocket. He looked at her—wide, startled eyes in a matchlessly beautiful

face, tumbled bronze hair, perfect white shoulders. . . .

"Beast!" she cried, her eyes darting flashing lights.

"Exquisite," he said gravely; and blew out the match. "Now I'm going to tell you a story before I take the pajamas and jump off the roof."

"Oh, are you?" she asked in a hoarse voice.

"Yes, indeed. When I was in India—Bombay, to be exact—Dottie Alton sent me the photograph of a really glorious little girl. That was a year ago. Dottie said in her letter: 'Your kind—the most wonderful girl I know—for you—if you can tame her.'"

Pamela's head, suddenly uplifted, swung back; her lips parted breathlessly; a curious emotion surged through her.

"You see," he continued, in his calm, measured tone, "this isn't sudden at all. The girl was Pamela Ardley."

"Oh!" she uttered, quickly placing a hand to her madly beating heart.

"I'm not a cad at all—just a man in love with an adorable girl."

"But," said Pamela, naïvely, "why did you kiss me—like that?"

"Because," he answered solemnly, "I wanted to see what sort of girl you were—if you'd resent it. And you did—not theatrically, but really—from the bottom of your heart to the tip of your temper." He laughed a little. Pamela thought that he was starting to get up

from the edge of the bed. "If you'll give me those pajamas I'll be going."

"Oh," said Pamela bitterly, "you're only interested in the pajamas, after being in love with my photograph for a year. Well, I don't mind telling you that I have your tiger photograph on the dressing table—but I have another one. Dottie gave it to me six months ago—and I'm only six months behind you in—in being in love."

Robert Harrington Shelton, the intrepid adventurer, the soldier of fortune—had been conquered by a woman.

VII

JIMMIE found a note under his door. It read: "Got them. The B. P's. Destroyed them. Rest in peace. Till we meet again.—R. H. S."

Dottie Alton found a note under her door. It read: "Got him. Wish me bon voyage. Happiest girl in the world.—P. A."

A big, gray roadster spun away from Mrs. Alton's house shortly after sunrise. The butler had discreetly accepted a twenty dollar bill. A starry-eyed girl had looked gloriously happy.

Mr. Shelton didn't cancel his sailing date. Instead, he was married. Pamela sailed with him to Algiers.

And the gods of Fate and the gods of Love inquired: "What could be sweeter?"



WOMEN have no sense of humor. They take a good friend and change him into a poor husband.



EVERY married man has an ideal: it is the woman who refused to marry him.



LOVE is never a habit, but habit is often mistaken for love.

Jones's Week-End

By André Saville

JONES gazed from the window of his apartment through the late August afternoon and sighed with unutterable ennui. It was Saturday and the city seemed curiously desolate; he felt strangely alone.

What was he to do? How might he divert himself? All his friends were away. And he pondered and reflected. Then, suddenly, he remembered that the Pringlewaites had invited him to visit them over the week-end at Glenhampton. If he packed quickly, there was just time to catch the 3:26.

Surely the country air would do him worlds of good, and, of course, there would be plenty of healthy exercise. He would send them a wire, at once. But moments were precious. He must hurry.

* * * * *

Five o'clock found Jones in the Pringlewaite limousine, being whisked through the little village of Glenhampton and, ten minutes later, he stood in the Florentine drawing-room, surrounded by a yelping mob of cocktail-guzzling, fox-trotting, flanneled youths.

"We've arranged the most amusing evening," his hostess told him. "Harry Fluffington's bringing three jazz bands from town."

"And after the dance at the Golf Club," added a cigarette-puffing, shingled-haired flapper, "everyone's dropping in here."

In the far corner of the room a trio of sable-skinned performers were rending the air with the latest discords, while two of the guests were waltzing on top of the piano. Another couple executed a tango in the fountain. Cocktails were being shaken on all sides, and several of the younger men lay about the lawn in a condition of complete coma.

"We've all decided," cried Pringlewaite, "not to go to bed for three days."

Jones nodded understandingly and, sauntering toward the hall, surreptitiously consulted a time-table. He noted that there was a seven forty-one.

* * * * *

True enough, it had been a long walk to the station and never again did he expect to set eyes upon his suitcase or its contents. But surely it had been worth it. Indeed, he would have walked twice the distance. And as he gazed from the window of the train through the late August evening, Jones sighed with unutterable satisfaction.



WHEN a pretty girl, on being kissed, closes her eyes, don't make the mistake of thinking that she is horrified.



EVERYBODY dislikes a scandalmonger—but not many ever doubt him.



Sextette

By Watkins Eppes Wright

I

ZOË was petite—and she clung. She was just seventeen and she lived with her grandmother. She flirted habitually, and when accused she lifted her blue eyes and said, "How can you say that! I was only being nice to him."

Her grandmother was impossible. Walter seemed always to see her with "specs" pushed up, her hands plunged in a bowl of dough. She was very strict with Zoë, and she forbade Walter to see her after she intercepted a note in which Walter asked Zoë to meet him on a street corner.

Walter saw Zoë just the same—and they decided to marry in spite of the cruel old lady. They planned to elope. Walter got into a crap game and missed the train.

II

LUCY was Zoë's opposite. She was dark and plump. She never clung; she cuddled. She knew eight different kisses, and nine ways to make candy. She perfectly adored embroidering. And she had a stepmother. Her father had married a demonstrator of cosmetics. He had seen the woman standing among the lipsticks and powderpuffs and capitulated, providing that there really is no fool like an old one.

Lucy hated her stepmother, and called her "unrefined." Walter called her worse things, and decided to take Lucy away from it all. They planned to marry in the autumn. Walter went away for the summer.

He never came back. He met Hazel.

III

HAZEL called herself a Bohemian, and could not take life seriously. She sang all day, gurgling trills as one might gargle one's throat. She believed in everything free, from lunch to love. She came in without knocking and curled up informally upon Walter's bed. She talked about souls and soup all in the same breath.

She had married when quite young, but left her husband because their egos did not blend. She explained it all, or tried to, by drawing a chart on pale green paper with a pink quill dipped in purple ink.

She and Walter got on splendidly until Hazel attended an evangelistic meeting and fell for a sermon that said marriage was a necessity. Walter balked. He had no desire for a wife—least of all for one like Hazel.

He packed up and went somewhere else.

IV

MARION was a divorcée. Walter met her in Atlantic City. She invited him up to Philadelphia for a week-end. He went.

He found Marion pleasing to the eye, although she was overly sentimental, and complained of having been disillusioned about life through her unfortunate marriage. Walter wanted to give her back her illusions, but the best he could do was hold her very close. He did so.

While in Philly Marion's ex-husband sent her a box of candy. Walter thought it awfully decent of him. Marion did not. She went into hysterics and sent for a doctor. Her

husband, she said, had always been insanely jealous. He had doubtless seen her with Walter. She threw the candy in the garbage can. She just knew it was poisoned.

Walter left that night.

V

CLAIRE was big, blonde and babyish—and few people understood her: least of all her husband. She was the misunderstood wife, and she told Walter he was the only man who had ever understood her. She and Walter often met in downtown hotels, and Walter always *knew* when Claire was approaching because she wore a lot of chains and spangles that rattled and jangled when she walked.

Developing a conscience, believing her life of duplicity to be a sin, Claire invited Walter up to meet her husband. Walter accepted the invitation. He found Claire's husband a fine, big-hearted, paternal sort of chap. Walter liked him tremendously. They became friends on the spot.

Claire could not understand it. She watched Walter and her husband like one in a daze. It was all beyond her. She had expected her husband to be suspicious and he was cordial! She went to bed with a headache.

It was at Claire's that Walter met Anne.

VI

ANNE was Claire's nineteen-year-old daughter. Although she looked like a flapper, she had a lot of sense. She looked right through people in a manner that was most disconcerting.

"I believe mother imported you to make dad jealous," she said. "Have you been whispering sweet nothings into my mother's susceptible ears?"

Walter blushed and lied. Anne smiled, called him a "nice old thing" and took him to ride in her roadster. Walter held on with both hands and paid three fines. Anne called him a darling, said she was sick of callow youths who tried to impress her with their knowledge of the world, the flesh and the devil—and said *he* was a man after her own heart.

"Do you know where the Little Church Around the Corner is?" Walter asked, one glorious afternoon.

Anne nodded. Walter asked if she minded driving there.

"I strive to please!" laughed Anne.

And so they were married!

Claire comes to visit them. She forgave Walter for ending his affair so abruptly. But one thing she'll never forgive him.

He made her a grandmother.



Spring Wind

By Eleanor De Lamater

LAST night

*A wind rushed down the sky
And laughed at dying winter.
I saw it driving black across the moon
Cloudy-cobwebs spun by Time on still cold nights.
And I could hear,
Above the toneless tumult everywhere
The clang and strike and echoing of stars
Set madly swinging where they hang
In space.*



One of his friends was false—a hound—despicable—had betrayed him in a way that is unforgivable. . . . How he found out who the rascal was, and what happened then, makes this tale as vivid as life itself.

Sentence of Death

By Gladys St. John-Loe

"ARLINGTON! Well I'm damned!"

I swung 'round with a start, wondering who in the world was the stern-faced, grizzle-haired man who addressed me, who stood gripping me firmly by the arm in the middle of the Strand. Then, as his expression relaxed, as his lips puckered to a once familiar grin, recollection swept back over me.

"Mace, old man!" I exclaimed. "Well of all the astonishing bits of luck!"

We turned into Romano's out of the chilly dampness of the November evening, and over a couple of drinks found ourselves slipping back into the old groove of friendship like a long-disused but perfectly fitting bolt into its socket.

Mace had altered enormously since I'd seen him last. It wasn't exactly that he looked older, though as a matter of fact he did, far older than I should have expected; it was something more subtle than that, something I couldn't explain myself by any actual physical alteration. It was rather—if you can understand what I mean—as though the spirit of the man had changed. In place of the frankly smiling, don't-care-a-damn-if-it-snows sort of expression with which I had always associated him, there brooded an air of shuttered, almost grim concentration, a look of bitterness, of disillusion—and of something else I couldn't define. While he was talking to me the effect disappeared

in a great measure, but the moment he was silent and his features fell into repose it slipped back again like an obscuring mask.

"It is jolly—our running into one another like this!" I enthused warmly. "Must be—let's see—quite nine years ago—isn't it?—since that last weekend at Belchaise?"

He nodded.

"Nine years and four months to be exact—the end of August, 1914."

"By Jove, of course. I remember! And two days later war broke out and we were all swept away helter-skelter. . . . By the way I wonder what became of the others—Remington and Archie Wymis and—and—let's see—Stoddard and Berry Cleland—and Darracq! I've often wondered. Funny how one loses touch. Darracq was killed, of course. I read an account of that in the papers. Nice chap Darracq. D'you remember the poetry he used to write? Yards and yards of it. . . . And didn't Remington go out to Rhodesia or somewhere?"

"He did but he's back again in London now. In fact they're all in London at the present moment."

"Really? Good egg! And you've managed to keep in touch?" I cried.

"Well—lately. As a matter of fact I've been hunting 'em up. I came across Remington and Archie Wymis by accident, and then the idea occurred to me—I thought—some sort of a reunion—. You remember the jolly times we used to have together?"

"Rather! I should just think I do. And you've succeeded in rounding up the other two?"

"Yes. Cleland was easy. He's a partner in his father's firm—Cleland and Haverstock the solicitors. Stoddard's a journalist of some sort—fearfully hard up I believe. And now—" He tapped the ash from his cigarette, took a careful sip of his Bronx cocktail and added: "Now fate's stepped in and completed the circle."

The "Circle"—that was what we had called ourselves in the old days. I drew in a long musing breath and stared away across the almost deserted bar. The past swooped towards me like some shining bird, brushed my jaded spirit with the caressing wing of happy recollection. To recapture, even for an hour, the magic essence of those bygone days! To feel the warm urge of youth's enthusiasms surging anew through the calloused veins of disillusioned manhood! What would I not give for such an experience?

Before we parted company we had planned a dinner that was to bring all six of us together again.

II

MACE CONWAY'S flat in Jermyn Street was the sort of luxurious bachelor affair that I occasionally dreamed of possessing myself—some day, when the precarious livelihood of a ship's doctor should have been substantially swollen by the chimerical legacy that only happens in novels.

When I arrived at five-and-twenty minutes past seven in the evening, it was to find Remington and Stoddard already there. Shortly afterwards Cleland joined us, and at exactly one minute past the half hour Archie Wymis sauntered airily in.

Dinner was announced by a Japanese man-servant, whom I recognized as having seen at Belchaise, and we passed from an attractive sitting-room, between large folding oak doors, into a dining-room beyond.

I suppose we were all feeling a trifle self-conscious, secretly readjusting our-

selves, as it were, to an appropriate atmosphere of familiarity and good-fellowship. At any rate, to begin with, in spite of Mace's valiant efforts to put us at our ease, conversation flagged heavily and rather uncomfortably. Somehow the effect we created—seated there about his immaculate oval table, in the center of his Jacobean dining-room, the sleek Jap moving in cat-footed attendance behind our chairs, the muffled sounds of the street silt-ing murmuringly upward through the close-drawn golden-brown curtains—was not at all what I had anticipated. I had come expecting a miracle, expecting to be swept back thirteen or fourteen years into the tingling atmosphere of dawning manhood, to feel precisely as I had felt during one of those jolly evenings in Mace's sitting-room at Oxford. And as I sat waiting for the miracle to happen, a chill sense of disappointment stole over me.

For one thing, with the exception of Archie Wymis—who was precisely his old trim dark-haired exquisitely groomed self—we all seemed to have changed so amazingly. It gave me quite a shock to discover that Remington's one-time genial plumpness had turned to uncompromising, rather vulgar fat, and that Stoddard—who had divided with Wymis the honours of a dandically neat appearance—wore shabby ill-fitting clothes that looked as though they were never even brushed, and that his lean idealistic features were marked with the stamp of chronic discontent. Cleland's once slim figure had thickened and coarsened considerably, whilst a particularly unpleasant scar—the result, no doubt, of a war wound—ran diagonally across his left cheek. It began at the corner of the mouth and went zig-zagging upwards to the eyebrow, dragging aside the lip in a rather horrible manner. And Berry Cleland had been the best looking of us all! "Adonis" we had always called him. . . . I shivered, wondering how I myself must look to them.

AT the head of the table sat Mace, his smile of conventional politeness hardening again and again into that look of haunting bitterness. He, undoubtedly, was the most profoundly altered of us all. It was as though a stranger brooded behind the cold mask of his features, giving them a curiously unfamiliar aspect. And once he had been the life and soul of the party. He it was who had kept the "Circle" together. Without him we should inevitably have drifted apart. I'd never met a man with such a genius for friendship.

Fumblingly I sought about in my mind for some explanation of the change in him; and abruptly came the memory of Philida. Why of course—Philida! . . . Poor old Mace! He'd thought the world of Phil. If ever a man had worshipped a woman . . . ! It was to celebrate the first anniversary of their wedding that we'd all been invited down to Belchaise that last week-end. Funny that even marriage hadn't succeeded in breaking up the "Circle"! We'd all prophesied that it would. "A woman always spoils a man for friendship," we'd told one another gloomily before the event. And the strange thing was that it hadn't seemed to make any difference.

Philida was lovely. I don't believe I've ever seen a more beautiful woman; but—well, somehow I never quite *liked* her. I didn't feel that she was good enough for Mace. Underneath her charming exterior I fancied her character had a certain shoddiness. . . . And Mace adored her. The look that would come into his eyes every time they rested upon her! As though something within him were eternally upon his knees! . . . And in the end she had left him—run away with some other man.

I shivered again as I heard him laugh—a peculiarly hard, mirthless sound. He had never laughed like that in the old days. The iron

must indeed have entered into his soul, must have burnt like an acid into the very roots of his being.

The meal went on, to the accompaniment of a somewhat vague stream of small-talk. And then, little by little, as the effects of the very excellent food—combined with the various even more excellent wines—got to work within us, the atmosphere of the gathering began subtly to change. The ice first cracked, then broke generously in all directions, to be finally swept away upon a flood of animated loquacity. By the time the last course had been disposed of we were all thoroughly, even a trifle hilariously, at ease. Tongues wagged; anecdotes and reminiscences were bandied about with an ever increasing liveliness. "D'you remember—?" sounded again and again like a recurring *motif* in an opera score. For my own part I had forgotten my initial disappointment. More and more surely, under the crust of the past nine years, I was rediscovering the well-remembered individualities of my five old friends.

Mace's reunion was proving a success after all.

III

WE went back through the folding oak doors into the sitting-room. It was a jolly sort of a man's room—sprawling leather armchairs and bookshelves and well-worn rugs and tobacco jars and sporting prints on the snuff-colored walls and a great blazing log fire roaring upwards from a wide terracotta hearth—the sort of fire that made you glad to remember how cold it was outside.

We sat around in a careless semicircle and Yamado, his black hair shining like ebony in the subdued crimson-tinted light, his flattish yellow face smiling its eternal smile of good-natured obsequiousness, came in with coffee on a tray. There was a slight lull in the conversation as he filled and handed a cup separately to each one of us. Then he went out again and we sat medi-

tatively sipping the strong black beverage and staring at the fire.

The talk went on. One by one we delved back into the past, retrieving some priceless half-forgotten memory of our common youth—a school row, some side-splitting college "rag," some memorable event of the playing fields or the river. We lived through them all again, vividly, uproariously.

The pyramids of ash grew long on the ends of Mace's fine Havana cigars, scattered themselves unheeded upon the floor. Every once in a while we would lift the glasses that stood invitingly at our elbows and sip the rich mellowness of their contents. A sense of blissful satisfaction, of inestimable well-being, settled over the whole party.

AND then, inevitably, the talk gravitated to that last meeting at Belchaise, that critical week-end when the fate of all Europe had hung in the balance. . . . And someone mentioned Philida.

I suppose, all along, the thought of her had been hovering teasingly in the background of our minds. I imagine I wasn't the only one who felt curious. But somehow—well, I suppose we hadn't liked to say anything—not until the name slipped out accidentally; and then we were all on the alert, watching Mace as a cat watches a mouse.

He got up from his chair to fetch a box of matches from the mantelpiece, and now he turned and faced us, his back to the glowing logs, a dead match in one hand, a fresh-lit cigarette in the other. I saw that his lips wore their faint cynical smile.

"Philida?" he said quietly, almost pensively. "Ah yes! . . . Philida! . . . I wonder someone hasn't mentioned her before. No doubt you've wanted to—and didn't like to. Afraid of hurting my feelings and all that. Well, you needn't worry."

He tossed the burnt match into the grate, deliberately scrutinized each member of the "Circle" in turn, and went on:

"I wonder—how much you've heard

about that affair? I mean how much that's true? If you're interested I'll tell you. I'd rather like you to know."

Instinctively I found myself saying: "But Mace, old chap, you can't *want* to talk about it. We can all guess how cut up you must have been and—"

He flashed me a quick probing look. I saw his nostrils quiver like the nostrils of a spirited horse. He was crushing the cigarette to a shapeless pulp between his fingers.

"But I do, I *do* want to talk about it!" he cried, his voice rising to a sudden passionate insistence. "In fact, I—I've brought you all here this evening—for the express purpose of talking about it."

A ripple of surprise went round the party. There was an embarrassed clearing of throats, a shuffling of feet, then someone said:

"Oh well—if you want to. But we're not—I mean, of course we all know it wasn't *your* fault."

"Indeed?"

Again his glance seemed to challenge us, seemed to linger just a fraction of a moment upon each individual face. And as his eyes met mine I was conscious of an odd thrill of foreboding.

"How can one judge," he said, "who is really to blame—in affairs of that sort? Women? They're the devil! I know there are men who say that all this talk about never being able to understand 'em is rot. Faugh! They've never tried—that's all. I tell you you never *can* understand 'em—down to rock bottom."

He halted, became aware of the mangled cigarette between his fingers and threw it impatiently into the grate.

"As for Phil—I thought I knew *her*. I thought I'd given her all a woman could want—that she was contented. If loving her could have made her happy—" His voice broke, his lips twitched; he stared blankly upwards after a voluting curl of blue-grey smoke. "Damn it all, *you* know what a fool I was about that woman! If cutting my heart out of my living body could have saved her a moment's pain. . . .

But it seems that wasn't what she wanted. No, there wasn't anything I could do. She'd just—got tired. I suppose I bored her, I was so simple, such a greenhorn. And I? Oh my God, I loved her! . . . You remember that last week-end? Even then—and we'd only been married a year—there was someone else. And then the war came—and that simplified matters. I hadn't been out in France three weeks before she left Belchaise for good and all. She sent me the usual sort of note, to the effect that she'd 'thought things over and come to the conclusion that our marriage was a mistake'—and that she'd gone away with 'the only man she'd ever really loved'—her 'soul-mate' I think she called him."

HE laughed, a harsh, ugly laugh, helped himself to a fresh cigarette and shut the case with a snap.

"I was in the trenches—helpless. It was eighteen months before I got my first leave, and by that time—well what could I do that was of any use? They'd covered their tracks very cleverly—and I don't know that I wanted, especially, to find out who the man was. I won't pretend that if I'd happened to come up against him in the beginning—that I wouldn't have killed him, gladly, with my two bare hands. But after all, it was her choice—and if he'd treated her decently—"

He paused in the act of lighting the cigarette. The breath hissed between his teeth with a little whistling sound.

"If only he'd treated her decently! . . . But he didn't. I found out afterward he'd given her hell. Hell! He took her to Paris and then smuggled her to Barcelona—that was in the early part of 1915. And when he was tired of her he just left her—stranded, starving—and came back and joined up in the British Army. . . . She died in 1917—without a penny, after sinking to the lowest depths of misery and shame any woman could sink to. . . . After the Armistice I spent months looking for her. You see, I loved her. I'd never, somehow, been able to get

her out of my mind. And at last I found her—all that was left of her. . . ."

He was staring straight before him with a look I can't describe, a mad look, as though he were seeing things—horrible things. Then, with the ominous quiet of controlled passion, he went on:

"As I stood by the filthy bed on which they told me she had died, as I looked at the nameless grave in which she'd been buried, I swore never to rest until I'd seen justice done to the man who had ruined her. Do you blame me?"

IV

MACE stopped speaking and silence settled upon the room like a soft pedal upon the throbbing strings of a piano. The call of a newsboy crying a "special late edition" drifted thinly upwards from the street. Then, rather jerkily, Wymis said:

"And the man—you found out who the man was?"

Mace shrugged.

"Not yet. It was extraordinary—the pains he must have taken to hide his name—just as if. . . . But he's in the net now. He can't escape." He held up his left hand, stared at it with a sudden peculiar intentness and went on. "Has it ever occurred to you—what interesting things hands are?" My only hope of discovering the man who ruined my happiness and murdered Philida—yes, murdered her!—lies in the fact that hands can't change, that they are a more certain means of identification even than faces. . . . You don't understand? Let me explain. . . . In the February of 1915 my man Yamado—who is extremely devoted to me—happened to be in Paris. And one day he was on the point of crossing a street when a block in the traffic caused a taxi to halt against the curb immediately in front of him. In the taxi he caught a glimpse of a woman's face—Philida's. He tried to see the face of the man she was with, but this was impossible. Suddenly the man

got up to open the window. His face was still invisible but for several moments his hands rested in full view upon the frame of the open window. Well—Yamado happens to have a peculiarly infallible memory for hands. If he once, either consciously or unconsciously, fixes the impression of a hand upon his memory, he never forgets it. We Europeans are apt to imagine that personality expresses itself only in the face. In the East, apparently, it's different. An Oriental realizes that a hand may be identified as surely, perhaps more surely, than a face—that a hand can't be disguised as a face can. And—well, as I've told you, Yamado happens to have

to be killed two days before Yamado saw my wife in Paris—well, that puts him out of it."

For one ghastly frozen moment nobody spoke. Then:

"Good God!" Stoddard exclaimed. "You accuse one of *us*? You must be crazy. You don't know what you're talking about."

With an elaborate gesture of nonchalance Mace put his cigarette to his lips, inhaled a lungful of smoke and blew it in graceful spirals toward the ceiling.

"I know perfectly well what I'm talking about. I'm saying that the man who ruined my life's happiness, who took Phil away from me—and finally left her to die like a dog in a Spanish

¶ Love is *Red Magic*. . . . Sometimes it seems brutal, selfish. . . . But it is really Nature working, mysteriously, for the betterment of the race. And woman is the priestess who tends the fires of the *Red Magic*. She is *The Eternal Huntress*. . . . Do not fail to read this startling story, beginning on Page 7 of this issue, of a modern girl whose curiosity leads her—like Pandora—"to fling open the forbidden chest of the knowledge of good and evil."

this gift of hand-memory supernormally developed."

I think it was Remington who said: "But how the deuce's that going to help you? You can't have the hands of every man in the world paraded for Yamado's inspection!"

Again Mace smiled his subtle, cryptic smile.

"No, of course not. Besides it isn't necessary. You see, I happen to know that the hands Yamado saw in Paris belong to one of five men."

"One of fi—?"

"Yes. He recognized them as belonging to one of the guests he had waited upon at table during that weekend at Belchaise."

"But—you mean to say—?"

"There were six of you present on that occasion, but as Darracq happened

hovel—is in this room at the present moment!"

The ring of passionate conviction in his voice left no doubt in my mind that he believed himself to be speaking the truth. I felt the hair prickle about the edges of my scalp. The palms of my hands were clammy with sweat.

"But—but, Mace, damn it all!" I blustered, "that's a pretty rotten statement to make, unless you're positive—and how can you be—on such evidence?"

"I'm quite satisfied that Yamado made no mistake."

"Then—for God's sake, man—which one of us was it? Which?"

Again he drew at his cigarette, and again the smoke swirled airily, maddeningly, upward. He shook his head.

"I don't know."

"You don't—*know*?"

"No. Before you came I arranged with Yamado that if, while waiting at table, he recognized the hands he saw in Paris he was to give me a certain sign. He gave me that sign when he came into the room just now. But I still don't know—*which*."

"Then what are you going to do?"

I was convinced now that he was mad. Every bit of the old Mace had vanished. His voice was uncannily quiet as he replied.

"What I intended to do—I have already done. I'm merely waiting for it to take effect."

"To—to take effect?"

"Good Lord, man, wh-what d'you mean?"

"Mace—for heaven's sake—!"

"Must be some mistake. You know perfectly well, old man—"

"One of us?"

"Can't you explain?"

We were all talking at once now, wildly, frantically, afraid, without knowing what it was that we feared. And he nodded, smiling his baffling smile, as he answered:

"Yes, I'll explain. It was arranged that when Yamado brought in the coffee he should hand each of you a cup separately—and that the cup that went to the man whose hands he recognized—should be poisoned."

"Poisoned!"

A thrill of pure horror swept round the "Circle" like the cold blade of a scythe.

"But, Conway—you must be mad!"

"Mad? Well, perhaps. Maybe you'd be mad, also, if you'd loved a woman as I loved my wife, and some man had done to her—what one of you did to Phil."

"But—poison?"

"Yes, a very subtle Eastern poison, one which Yamado assures me is often used on similar occasions in China—a poison which produces no marked symptoms beyond a—well, perhaps a mild feeling of nausea, but which causes certain death within an hour of being swallowed." He pushed back his cuff,

looked at his wrist watch and added: "It's now—let me see—exactly fifty-three minutes since the coffee was served. Another seven and I shall know positively—which one of you it was."

HE dropped his arm to his side. His tall, straight figure reared itself stiffly against the mantelpiece, partly shutting off the glowing redness of the smouldering logs. My heart seemed to stand quite still as I looked at him. A sensation of actual physical sickness was beginning to crawl about in the pit of my stomach. The sounds of rumbling traffic in the street outside, the blare of a motor horn, the grind of hurriedly applied brakes, seemed infinitely remote, irrelevant, like sounds filtering through a nightmare.

With an immense effort of the will I dragged my gaze away from Mace and stared round at the other five.

Wymis, who sat next to me, was white to the lips. His mouth hung open in a stupid, surprised sort of way, as if someone had just struck him a stunning blow between his eyes. Remington's flushed face had turned a violent bruised-looking purple. His big, plump hands looked like flabby lumps of clay as they clasped the ends of his chair-arms. Stoddard, a piece of lank hair straying untidily down over his high forehead, was staring at Mace with an air of fascinated absorption, for all the world like some lean and hungry bloodhound on a leash. Was he thinking, I wonder, of the excellent "story" he would be able to concoct out of the affair? And exactly opposite me, his face clearly illumined by the glow of a crimson-shaded electric lamp, the scar on his cheek showing up like some horrid, freshly opened wound, sat Berry Cleland. His hands were pressed tightly between his knees. His shoulders sagged forward into a crouching attitude. His mouth, unintentionally contorted into a grimace by the dragging aside of the left corner of the upper lip, seemed to twitch and gibber in a frantic effort for self-control. And his eyes! Never in my life have I

seen such an expression in any human face. It was like the crazy, panic-stricken look of a wild animal in a trap!

He began to shiver. His body cringed lower and lower in its chair. A ghastly choking sound bubbled up out of his throat. . . . And instantly every eye in the room was upon him. . . .

How long we sat there, staring at him, overwhelmed with the cold horror of comprehension, I have no idea. I suppose, really, it couldn't have been more than a few seconds, though it seemed an interminable period of time. Somewhere, a long way off, I could hear a firebell ringing. And somewhere quite close at hand a clock was ticking—marking off the fatal moments as they slid one by one into eternity.

And then, abruptly, Cleland moved. He threw up his arms and staggered wildly to his feet. He stood swaying grotesquely before us, his face convulsed with a look of indescribable terror. Finally, with a strangling shriek, his knees gave way beneath him. He collapsed upon the hearthrug and lay still.

V

NOBODY moved or spoke. The ringing of the firebell died away in the distance. The ticking of the clock went on—tick-tock, tick-tock, regular, inevitable, maddening.

Someone knocked over a glass. It fell against the fender with a brittle smashing sound that broke effectively through the spell of inertia that possessed us.

With a brusque movement, like a dog shaking a wet coat, Mace pulled himself together and looked down at the crumpled thing at his feet.

"You—Cleland?" he said. "Well, I'm damned! And yet—I don't know that I'm surprised. You took a hell of a lot of getting here this evening. . . . So you're the man Phil loved? Her 'soul-mate', eh? Wonder what she'd think of you now—if she could see you!"

His voice was cold, indifferent, uncannily matter-of-fact. With a jerk I was on my feet, violently clutching at his arm and crying:

"Mace! Mace! Good God, man, what have you done!"

He stared at me stupidly, his eyes blinking a little through the smoke.

"Done?"

"Yes—Cleland! Heavens, man, don't you realize—?"

In a flash my professional instincts asserted themselves. Thrusting him hurriedly aside, I dropped to my knees beside Cleland's body.

A few moments' examination was sufficient to convince me that he was beyond all human aid.

"I don't know if you realize the seriousness of this business," I went on, as I rose awkwardly to my feet again. "Of course you—you understand that he's dead?"

Mace nodded.

Someone else repeated:

"Dead? You're quite sure? Hasn't—er—fainted or—or anything of that sort?"

I shook my head.

"No. Quite sure."

Again there was silence. We were all standing now, Mace imperturbably erect before the fireplace, the rest of us facing him across the still dark form that had been Berry Cleland.

I think it was Stoddard who at last suggested:

"Hadn't we better—I mean—isn't it usual—in a case of this sort, to—er—well, send for the police? Hang it all—bound to come out—simply bound to. No sense—messing things up."

And Mace himself answered:

"Certainly. Ring up the police by all means. I believe Vine Street's the nearest. You'll find a telephone over there—and a directory in the middle drawer."

He pointed to a writing bureau standing against the wall between the two windows.

"But you realize, don't you, the consequences to yourself?" I urged anxiously.

He shrugged.

"Why? What have I to fear?"

"But—! Listen, Mace—surely you realize that this is murder?"

He shook his head.

"Murder? Rubbish! Nothing of the sort. Simple justice—that's all."

"You may think so; I'm not going to argue that it isn't, but I'm afraid an English jury will take a different view of the matter."

"Jury? What's it got to do with a jury?"

"But—don't you see?—bound to be a trial?"

"Why?"

"Well, hang it all, you've deliberately poisoned a man."

"Poisoned? Nothing of the sort."

"But—"

"There was no poison in that coffee."

"No poison?"

"That's what I said. Look! There's a drop still left in his cup. It can be analyzed. He died of funk, sheer funk—and a guilty conscience."

"And you didn't—kill him?"

We stared at one another in blank amazement. In silence we watched Mace drop the smoked-out end of his cigarette into the heart of the smoldering logs. His voice sounded very weary, like the voice of an old man, as he replied:

"No. He killed himself. . . . And now if you'd like to ring for the police—?"

I snatched in a quick breath of relief. The room spun dizzily round me as I stumbled across to the telephone.



The Triumph of Film Over Fact

By Stuyvesant Barker

IT was the middle of the third reel of "The Scandals of Society," and the dinner party at Cyril Hemmingbrooke's Long Island residence was being flashed. At a table laid for forty covers, embellished with American Beauty roses, orchids, Easter lilies, gardenias, chrysanthemums and begonias, the guests, bedecked in tinselled paper hats and bathing suits, hurled handfuls of confetti and toy balloons high into the air. Fountains spouted champagne, while a troupe of semi-clad dancing girls, engaged at enormous expense, tripped to the strains of three jazz bands. The host, with a beauteous maiden on each knee, flung twenty dollar gold pieces into the marble swimming pool.

"I wonder," pondered the fashionable young millionaire from one of the loges, "if I could get a job as a movie actor."



THE test of true love: it is one's last, but it seems like one's first.



Infidelity

By Jean Rolfe

IT is a pleasant sort of scene—a scene of domestic content. Hearthfire with its sunset-glow—Morris chair, plushy and deep—man in the Morris chair—smoking-jacket and briar pipe—woman on a little hassock at his feet, clasp, ing drawn-up knees. . . . Upstairs babies sleep. . . .

It is a pleasant sort of scene—a scene of domestic content. But I, the woman, am not contented. My thoughts are far, far away. I am dreaming of my first love.

What a boy he was—with the joy of living in his brown eyes' twinkle and and in the spring of his step. We were young—both of us—gloriously young, and together we sought the sparkle of Life's wine, and revelled in the happy-go-luckyness of our youth. With him I sowed my delightfully innocent crop of wild oats, and dreamed of the day I should laughingly reap its harvest in the mellow autumn of thought, and press it in my album of memories. There is more tenderness than laughter in the reaping. . . .

My husband is settled and home-ified. He does not radiate the joy of living. He is at peace—and asks no more. His world is comprised of his pipe, his smoking-jacket, and the business-sheet of the *Daily Argus*. He loves, loves, but his love is placid—and he does not miss the glamor. And in his blind complacency, he suspects no rival.

So, in the twistedness of it all, I shall go on through Life—dreaming . . . dreaming . . . dreaming of my first and only love—of my husband before I married him.



With a Gift of Roses

By Arthur Wallace Peach

THE flowers have a speech
That every heart can hear,
And what our lips can never say
They utter without fear.

So here are roses wrought
Of Junetime's happiness:
What they would say for me to you
I know your heart can guess!



He was a millionaire. He ruled men—and women—with an iron hand. "TAKE AND PAY" was his grim motto, and he gave no quarter and expected none. . . Then life confronted him with something that he couldn't govern, something that money and power couldn't control—a woman's heart, and a scoundrel's desperation. He met the crisis and out of it grew something fine and strong. But that, too, had its price.



*A Complete
Novelette*



Take & PAY

By Virginia Kline

Chapter One

ON THIS provokingly capricious afternoon in early April, Brett Wills was at home alone, guarded from all the sycophants who had of late so wearied him.

Miles Tanner, that greatest of neurologists, had definitely exiled him from business and had recommended first a leisurely cruise on his yacht, then an extended rest abroad.

The big man was now making his plans and had denied himself to the throng of well-wishers who had been driving to the door since morning. He paced his splendidly luxurious study restlessly, eyes roving from the exquisitely carved bookcases packed with rarest treasure to priceless tapestries and paintings—each a masterpiece. These had given him genuine delight in his years of avid collecting. Today they meant less than nothing—mere back-

ground for what claimed his cynical attention, the tables piled high with rich gifts, the many-tinted fresh-cut flowers and gorgeous plants which took up every available spot.

Old Merrick, his trusted attendant, entered with more.

"Take them away," Wills ordered irritably. "All of them. Can't a man have a birthday without having the place look like a funeral?"

Merrick hastily began to clear and finally picked up a single orchid surrounded by cool, delicate ferns reposing in a fragile vase.

"Leave that," said Wills shortly, "and send the others to the hospital."

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. MacNeil is dining with me."

"Very well, sir."

ANGUS MACNEIL was Wills' attorney and for many years his closest friend and only confidant. There were many things to discuss for Wills realized poignantly that he must set his house in order.

Wills was in a strange, uncharacteristic mood. A probing, analytical mood. He was facing his life as it had been, as it appeared to him to be at this moment.

So far as he knew there was no one who would mourn sincerely if he died—not even MacNeil whose devotion he had always sensitively suspected was strongly compounded of self-interest plus the immense prestige his star client's fame afforded him.

Was there anyone indeed to rejoice if his health improved? Anyone of the givers of gifts who really gave a hang whether he lived or died? No!—it was mere convention—the flowers, the mementoes—all empty outward show, set compliments to a brilliant far-reaching financier who still grasped the reins of power. . . .

The man of great possessions smiled bitterly at the paradox of grasping millions—with hands stark empty!

With a queer, persistent impulse to peer even deeper into the mirror of his days he left his study and strolled along

the hallway to his wife's apartments. The door was closed but unlocked. He went in.

The beautiful rooms had been unoccupied for months. Bedroom, boudoir, sitting-room, had a suggestion of immaculateness, of detachment, of lack of relationship to the rest of the house.

There was a sneer on Wills' face. He hated—had always hated, Evalyn's aloofness—an intangible exclusiveness which yet challenged intrusion at every turn.

Why had he married her? Propinquity for one thing. She was the daughter of one of his partners. They had been thrown much together. Twice her age, he had married her ten years before, when she was twenty—a stunning girl with a hint of temperament and warmth which roused his ardor. She had married him—as he quickly discovered—because of the dazzling gifts he offered—name, great wealth, security.

His ardor had waned soon enough under her frank indifference. Then he tried to conquer her by force—and failed. After that they went along on extremely courteous yet covertly unfriendly terms. She had a genius for administering the affairs of his household, she upheld the dignity of his position as few women could. She was extremely useful to him—and he to her.

To be sure, of late they had been apart a good deal, he abroad or on long cruises aboard his yacht or she abroad or at home in his absence—still, through it all, no hint of definite gossip. All was swathed with screening veils of tact, the emptiness of their marriage hidden by a high wall of apparently impeccable conduct.

At present Evalyn was at "Windy Cliff," their resting-place in the Adirondacks. He had not heard from her for several days. No doubt she would send him a correct and pleasant wire for his birthday. She always had.

He sighed. Of all days to be alone.—Even Evalyn would be a relief! . . .

HE STOPPED at her desk and gazed idly down at its well-chosen appur-

tenances. He picked up a jade paper-cutter and examined its workmanship wondering the while what life might have meant if Evalyn had not been Evalyn; if he had married for reasons other than the actual reasons—if he had had a son—a daughter perhaps. . . .

But he was not given to regrets or remorse. He tossed the bit of jade down on the desk and turned on his heel. He would call up MacNeil and have him drop up at once rather than wait until seven. He took a step toward the door. It opened. Evalyn stood in the doorway.



Chapter Two

"MERRICK told me you were here," she said in a cool, perfectly modulated voice in which there was in this instant an unusual touch of timidity.

"Yes—" he stopped abruptly. It was quite impossible for him to confide his mood to Evalyn. "I had no idea you were coming to town," he went on with his normal suavity, "your letter did not mention—"

"When I wrote it I had no intention of leaving Windy Cliff," she interrupted quickly.

"It couldn't have been because of my birthday?" he ventured, half-maliciously.

He was an arresting and dominant figure as he stood there facing her—six feet two, of powerful build, proud head thrown back, penetrant grey eyes searching hers, strong, stubborn mouth, with no suggestion now of its rare and singularly winning smile, pursued speculatively.

Evalyn's eyes dropped to the gloves she was absently pulling off. "As a matter of fact, I'd quite forgotten about your birthday," she replied a trifle apologetically.

That amused him. "At least there's no pretense about you. I daresay it's shopping that brings you then?"

"No—I came in to have a talk with you, Brett."

"Shall we go to my study?"

"I'd rather we stayed right here."

"As you please."

But Wills was surprised. Always before when matters of importance were to be discussed she had chosen his study, for there she felt even more alienated and could reason with him as with a stranger.

He seated himself in a comfortable armchair, leaned back and with eyes half-closed, studied her keenly. There was something different about Evalyn today. Not that she was looking extremely handsome, for with *svølte* figure and finely-cut features that was not difficult. No—it was something quite other than that—an indefinable glow—her dark eyes were less candidly cold, her disdainful lips had lost their disdain. Nor was her admirable poise wholly intact. She seemed to be crowding back fear—fear of him—and of herself.

Observing his puzzled scrutiny, her face hardened. "I've something very serious to say."

"Serious?"

Gathering her forces, she announced with pointed clarity, "In a nut-shell, I — want — my freedom, Brett."

Wills straightened, alert and aggressive. "Freedom!—you've had it for years."

"Not legally."

"We have an agreement," he reminded her frigidly.

"I wish to cancel it."

This was a subject upon which Wills was inexorable. "You know perfectly well," he pronounced, "that nothing but death will cancel it."

She was evidently prepared for strenuous opposition.

"I was a fool to make that compact," she said.

"Nevertheless you did," he retorted with an ugly undertone.

"I regret it."

"That does not concern me."

"It does," she cried breaking through her fear of him completely. "I demand my freedom, I tell you—and you are going to give it to me!"

"Not while I live," he reiterated calmly.

She was battering her head against a granite wall.

"You sold your freedom to me for three millions," he said with insulting emphasis. His teeth were clenched, his jaw set. She had brought out that phase of him his antagonists most dreaded. "You accepted that very decent settlement," he bitingly recalled, "and the deal was permanently closed. You agreed to remain the head of my household for the term of my life. There is nothing more to be said."

He rose, but her astounding loss of control detained him.

"I can't stand it any longer," she burst out as if a dam had broken within her and she were being swept along on the acrid flood. "I've stood it as long as I could! We hate each other—have hated each other for years. I know I married you because you dazzled me—you and your money and your position—but I've paid a terrible price for what I've gotten out of it. I was only twenty. You could have won me if you'd known how not to be as ruthless, as cruel to a woman you owned as you have always been to the men and the corporations you've ruled with your iron will. There was something in me—something I've inherited that made me freeze you out of my life—in order to save myself. I fought you—and won the settlement. Now I'm going to fight you because I'm sick of being your millionaire housekeeper. I can't stand my role of figurehead—and your secret sneers—any longer. I want to give you back that money and buy back my right to live as I please!"

He had let her go on uninterrupted, his stubborn mouth tightening more and more as she proceeded. When she had finished, he waited for sufficient grip on his anger, then snapped, "You live as you see fit now."

"Within the limits prescribed."

"I never questioned you," he declared incisively.

She came nearer. "Brett," she

offered desperately, "I have not come here to quarrel with you. We can settle this amiably and peacefully if you will."

"And if I will not?"

"I shall have to settle it—the best I can."

A threat—but he chose to ignore it. Even to placate a little. "Perhaps you will change your attitude," he suggested, "when you hear that Doctor Tanner has warned me—I may live only a short time."

"I already know," she acquainted him frankly, "but Doctor Tanner also told me—you may live for years."

"Good God! You went to Tanner to find out how long I was likely—"

"I had to know," she interposed with nervous rapidity, "how long I was likely to lead this unnatural life. When he told me—I came to you—I've made my proposition. Won't you—let me go?"

"You've had my answer," he replied unmoved.

"It would be very simple for you to secure me a divorce, Brett," she pleaded eagerly.

"Divorce is out of the question," he hammered it again.

This brought the threat to the surface. "I don't want to search for grounds myself—although I know—"

"You are not the only one who has not made pretenses," Wills admitted, "but this is all to no purpose. What interests me is—what is back of all this? What has changed you so miraculously?" Then, pinning her down with brutal directness, "Is it a man?"

Knowing him to be devoid of it, she nevertheless threw herself upon his mercy. "Yes."

"A man you wish to marry?"

"Yes."

"I sympathize," said Wills suavely, "but—cannot alter my mode of living at this stage of the game."

"There need be no scandal—" she urged hoping against hope to persuade him.

"There is bound to be," he contested,

"a man in public life linked to huge enterprises is always subject to the vilest kind of muck-raking."

"There are ways—" she faltered.

"No use," he cut her off with his last vestige of patience exhausted, "you'll have to wait. You can afford to. You've years ahead."

"I shall *not* wait," she defied him hotly.

"What can you do?" was the sinister challenge.

"I—don't know," she replied slowly, meeting his tremendous force with all the valor of which she was capable—"but I propose to find out!"

He laughed harshly and with a light contemptuous snap of his fingers which gauged all the influence she could bring to bear at a pin's fee, he strode fiercely back to his study. . . .



Chapter Three

PRESENTLY Merrick entered and handed him a card.

He tossed it aside without glancing at it. "No callers, I told you," he said petulantly.

"But—the gentleman—insists," pursued quiet old Merrick—Merrick, who of all the world, had not the slightest fear of the big man.

Wills picked up the card, frowned, cast a furtive glance at the orchid in the slender vase, then spoke, "I'll go down."

Merrick preceded him. Wills read the card once more, tore it to atoms and carefully dropped it into the wastepaper basket. Then he followed down to the drawing-room to greet a haggard, boyish-looking chap of about thirty with shrewd, handsome face marred by dissipation. He was smartly tailored and there was a graceful swagger in his walk as he came forward. Yet Wills noted that he was as white as a sheet and had a hard time to control his slender, well-kept hands—they fluttered plainly in fact as he clutched his cane tightly to steady himself.

"How do you do, Mayne?" said Wills curtly.

Winthorpe Mayne had always impressed Wills as evasive, elusive, a braggart, a bluff and a trickster. He was a stock-broker of many ups and downs which easily accounted for the undercurrent of uneasiness which characterized him. No doubt he was again on the rocks.

Today, however, he was unmasked. There was nothing evasive or elusive in the direct manner in which he tackled his subject.

"I had to see you today," he stated bluntly.

Wills smiled. Evidently this was his day of revelations. "Yes?"

"I shan't beat about the bush."

"Good!" What do you want? Money?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Position."

"Position!"

"The highest in your power to grant to a man of my equipment."

"You are not equipped for any position in my power to grant," remarked Wills with crushing candor.

"That's a lie!"

"*What!*"—Wills' voice trembled with anger and he was on his feet in an instant—but so was Mayne—Mayne with a revolver in his hand.

"I say that's a lie and you damn well know it is!" repeated Mayne in a low tone, husky and intense. "You know I'm as clever as any of them and you've half a dozen plums within my scope."

Merrick had gone up but John, the footman, was at the entrance door but a few feet away. However, the press-button was out of Wills' reach. He must play for time.

"Granted you are as clever as you think," he returned smoothly, "why come to me? Why not to one of my directors or—"

"Because your word is supreme. And I have to have your offer in my pocket this afternoon."

"Not if I know it!" said Wills grimly,

ignoring the slight but perceptible move of Mayne's weaponed hand.

There was a half-mad, hunted look in the younger man's riveted gaze. "I'm desperate—" he warned.

Wills saw that Mayne was at his rope's end. "Explain," he commanded.

"I'm in trouble—the real thing," Mayne blurted out feverishly. "I've been losing heavily all year—but today I'm done—unless you come through."

"I've 'come through' a number of times before."

"There was nothing serious before. This time others have been involved with me—"

"You mean you have involved others," corrected the big man contemptuously.

"I'm not here to argue," snapped Mayne. "I've offered money, collateral—everything. I can get all the money I want—" he bragged, "if I go after it!"

"Where?" sneered Wills.

Mayne laughed a short convincing laugh and glanced down at the trusty weapon in his hand. "From you for one," he retorted brazenly.

"A common blackmailer," taunted his victim.

But Mayne was beyond taunts. "The gang who've strung me up," he went on doggedly, "are out for my blood. It's dollar for dollar—no less—to the lot of them—or they'll go the limit. This is where you come in!"

Wills stared—almost in admiration—at the magnificent impudence of it. "I!"

"You!" repeated Mayne with greater emphasis. "I promised to pay up every cent—and make it worth their while to boot."

"Pay up every cent—with nothing. You're out of your head."

"I can do it—it's a cinch—in five years—and be 'way ahead of the game besides. They see it! They're willing—if I show them the contract!"

"What contract?"

"The five-year contract you're going to sign," replied Mayne with his chin set.

"You're crazy—" was Wills' honest opinion.

"Oh, no, I'm not," corrected the man who had the drop on him. "My brain's as clear as a bell. I'm in bad—and I'm young and know how to live. I don't intend to go to jail or to the wall. You've got to get me out of this. What's more—you've got to put me so high up that no one can ever touch me!"

"You *are* crazy—crazy as a loon!" repeated Wills. It was as far as the pole-star from him to do what Mayne demanded. "I'll see you hanged," he declared, "before I place you in a position of trust."

Mayne's eyes glittered. "And I'll shoot you straight through the heart—if you don't come across!" he said with iron deliberation as he took a true and steady aim.

An instant's freighted pause—broken by a soft, imperative voice close to them—

"Don't speak, Brett."

The quiet of Evalyn's tone cleft like a lightning stroke into the consciousness of Mayne. When she silently held out her hand for the revolver, he surrendered without a word—shaking in every limb. He had enjoyed holding up Wills—but not in the presence of witnesses.

Evalyn looked slowly from one to the other—trying to read beneath the surface. Then she said slowly, "I'll just station Merrick outside those curtains—with this—" glancing down at the revolver, "and have John telephone—"

"No!" countermanded Wills, "no publicity. This is outside the jurisdiction of the police. Mr. Mayne and I were merely having a friendly argument over a contract. You happened to catch him in one of his most persuasive attitudes."

The dry humor of the big man brought a faint smile to Evalyn's lips. He had always had supernatural courage in crises. She had always admired him for it. This was not the first time his life had been threatened. He was behaving with characteristic coolness.

"In any case," she said, "Merrick and John will be at hand."

"Very well, but I shall not need them," laughed Wills; "my young

friend and I are practically through with our argument—thanks to your intrusion." Then he added graciously, "I am indebted, Evalyn."

Her eyelids lowered. A strange struggle seemed to be going on within her. But in a moment she turned and left the two men alone. . . .

"Well," proceeded Wills genially to his shaken antagonist, "is the discussion over?"

"Not by a long sight," returned Mayne sullenly, pulling himself together. "But I don't mind telling you I thought Mrs. Wills was at Windy Cliff—I've no taste for publicity myself."

"You needn't worry about that," said Wills, again with that dry, bitter humor. "The episode will not be mentioned—that is—" he made quick to impress—"unless you make it necessary."

"Oh, I'll make it necessary all right!" volleyed Mayne, brought fiercely back to the issue, "and in a way that will plaster you across the front page of every tattle-sheet!"

Wills might have laid this to bluff, but something in the assurance of the weakling before him caught his ear.

"What do you mean by that?" he probed.

"I mean," Mayne fairly spat at him, "you wouldn't like this little 'episode,' as you call it—depicted in court, would you?"

"Court!"

Mayne was the amused one now. "Court!—where I intend to sue you for alienation of my wife's affections."

Wills hung on to himself, but paled perceptibly. He looked his accuser straight in the eyes: "You are insane."

"Am I?" sneered Mayne. "You've been loaning me money at intervals for over a year. You've been making love to my wife for over a year. You thought I didn't know—but I did!"

"You whelp!"

"You've broken with my wife—and so you're done with me—you think! But if you don't come through—"

Wills took a long step forward, hands clenched. But there was an

ominous tightening of his overburdened heart. Of necessity he must control himself. His hands dropped. "Do you mean to go into court and besmirch the name of your wife—who is innocent?" he managed to say quietly to his opponent, who stood ready to defend himself.

"Look here," Mayne hurled at him, "drop the grandstand play!—Orchid has told me the whole story."

Orchid!—Wills blanched at that. The knife had gone in—and turned. So this was a badger game? With Orchid in the leading role!

However, Wills could not accept the statement from the yellow cur who was her husband. "What an incomparable liar you are!" he drawled. "You know perfectly well that my friendship for Orchid is of the highest character, that I have never seen her alone in her home or anywhere else, that no one could possibly question our relationship."

"In that case," responded Mayne with velvety malice, "it is strange she should suggest you as a way out of my difficulty—that she should give me these to clinch the bargain in the event that you balked at the contract." He had felt for a packet of letters and drawn them out. "When I leave here I go to my lawyer—unless—"

Wills glimpsed his own handwriting on the top screed. Numbness crept over him. He gripped the back of his chair.

THE two looked long at each other, each measuring his chances. . . .

Mayne did not flinch. All his life a welcher and a coward, this was his great moment. He faced one of the biggest men in the country wholly unafraid—for he had him on the hip. Everyone knew Brett Wills' one weak point—horror of scandal—and with what unremitting care he had safeguarded himself from even the lightest slander. Head of the International Builders, Incorporated, a vast constructive organization which girdled the earth, he intended to go down to poster-

ity as an example of the greatly beneficent, the irreproachable financier.

The very thought of having the reputation of a lifetime shattered by a sordid case in the public courts seared him—as Mayne well knew. He was likely to make almost any concession before he permitted that catastrophe.

Wills pondered long before giving his answer, but when he spoke he had in a great measure regained his poise—at least outwardly.

"What would you say to—Assistant Manager of our interests—in France?" he asked.

Mayne's face lit up triumphantly. He really was clever. He checked up instantly the possibilities of that appointment. "Splendid!"

"You accept?" was Wills' mechanical query.

"You mean it?"

Wills cast a look of loathing at Mayne, but took out his fountain pen, wrote a recommendation to a high official and signed his name.

Mayne held out his hand for it ravenously, but Wills waved it away and leisurely drew out his cigarette case. Turning the underside to the man who had blackmailed him, he let him absorb the three ruby-studded words:

"Take and Pay"

"THAT," observed Wills, "is my creed. When I take—I pay. When I pay—I—take. . . ."

"All right," agreed Mayne, "what's the price?"

A long, keen, gambler's look passed between them, each searching—each finding.

Finally—"Orchid!"—Wills' grim lips formed distinctly.

Mayne lit a cigarette and nervously paced the length of the drawing-room before turning to Wills. Then he threw his cigarette away and cried—"Done!"

"You understand," said Wills, after a breathless moment, "you are to go to France—and make good. If you fail—the organization will take care of you."

"I'll make good," flung back Mayne

testily, annoyed at the covert warning, "any fool has backbone enough—with an organization behind him—and I'm no fool!"

"That is settled, then," conceded the big man, "but do not forget the other condition upon which hinges the validity of your contract."

"That's settled, too!" promised Mayne.

"You understand?—you are never to see Orchid again—from this hour on."

"That can be arranged. Orchid is in Rye. When do I sail?"

"Tomorrow at noon."

"I'll pack my traps and send them to the pier."

"Without bidding Orchid good-bye?"

"All Orchid wants," said Mayne casually, lighting another cigarette, "is to be well rid of me."

"Yet she armed you with the letters—and sent you here to trap me?"

"Only as a court of last resort. Orchid has as little taste for scandal as we have. She flinched at the idea of having a defaulting husband on her books. Oh, don't think there's any love lost between us. She has no more use for me—than she has for you. The letters were her way of killing two birds with one stone."

Having packed all the poison he could into one last speech, Mayne coolly handed over the packet in question and received in return the coveted recommendation.

Then, picking up hat and cane, he swung gracefully to the portièred doors at which he paused to turn and bow with mock deference.

"I have to thank you," he said ironically, "for the most profitable interview of my life!"

After which he threw back his head and laughed insultingly, brazenly, swinging round to swagger out past Merrick and John on guard in the hall. . . .

WILLS SANK into his chair, faint and trembling. His heart was galloping madly like a runaway horse.

Merrick came in and quickly administered restoratives.

"Shall I send for Doctor Tanner, sir?"

"No, no—I'll be all right. Help me upstairs. I'll lie down for a while."

"Yes, sir."

"Is Mrs. Wills in?"

"No, sir. She went out a few minutes after the gentleman—left, sir—in the sedan."

"Did she say she was on her way to Windy Cliff?"

"She did not say, sir, but she left this note for you."

The big man opened it languidly:

"MY DEAR BRETT: Forgive me for pursuing my own object in view of your unpleasant experience this afternoon. Perhaps I am as desperate in my way as that gambler was in his. And although I shall not hold you up at the point of a revolver, I shall certainly pit my strength against yours, my wit against your wit.

"I shall be at the Biltmore for the next hour or two. You can reach me by telephone. Call me—tell me you have decided to give me my happiness.

"EVALYN."

Wills' narrowed eyelids presaged no relaxing of his decision toward Evalyn, no softening of his mood. She had made her bed—a downy bed feathered with millions—let her lie in it. Good God! what did the woman expect . . . ? She had clinched her bargain—a damn clever bargain—cold, tight and iron-clad—let her stick to it—for he certainly would. . . . He had a furious impulse to tear the note across, but quelled it in the presence of Merrick. Instead he folded it carefully and tucked it in his pocket.

With determined effort he dismissed it from his mind and gave an order.

"My car, Merrick."

"You're not going out, sir?"

"I'll rest first. But I must go. I'll be home in plenty of time for dinner."

"You've had a hard day," complained Merrick. "Do you think you'd better risk it, sir?"

"That's my affair," said Wills sharply; then, softening, "but you'll come with me, Merrick—I am a bit shaky. . . ."

Chapter Four

AT a little before five Wills was driven to a small apartment hotel not far from the Biltmore. According to instructions, Merrick remained in the car.

In a few minutes Wills found himself ushered into the charming little parlor of the apartment occupied by the Winthorpe Maynes. And Orchid's devoted French maid, Henriëtte, was crying—"Madame ees ill—but she weel see you."

Henriëtte opened the door leading into a short hallway which in turn led directly on to Orchid's bedroom. That door being half open, he caught a charming glimpse of Orchid on her satin-covered bed, propped up by many silken pillows and looking as lovely and fragile as the flower of her name.

On learning that he was actually waiting in her chic little parlor, she sprang lightly from the bed, shook her chiffons into place, stole a wary glance into her mirror, and with no more preparation than that, came slowly in to greet him.

He looked at her a long minute without saying a word of greeting, drank in her exquisite loveliness as she stood there. He had not seen her for several weeks. She had bobbed her curly red hair and it made her look very young and childish. Her changeful blue-green eyes, usually brimming with mischief, regarded him with a profound sadness strangely disquieting. Her mouth—which he adored—not small but lusciously formed, was made to smile coaxingly. It drooped now as if too weary to make an attempt, and somehow the provoking dimple in her chin refused to play havoc. He was alarmed, too, by her extreme fragility. Since he had last seen her she had lost the soft curves which so became her, and although not less beautiful with the too delicate outline—he perceived that it was not only her malady but some inner flame of white intensity which was rapidly burning the body away.

After the first fierce impact of their meeting thus throbbing in the silence,

the woman brushed aside the whirling thoughts which mingled, tempted and tormented, and resolutely found her voice.

"Forgive me," she said lightly as he bowed over her hand and breathed her name, "for permitting you to come up when I feel so done for, but since you have broken your promise not to communicate with me—I had to know why—being a woman!"

Henriette came in and began to arrange pillows on the chaise longue, glancing anxiously at her young mistress as she did so.

"Let Henriette make you comfortable," urged her visitor. "You do look ill."

"Henriette insists upon making a baby of me," pouted Orchid, but by the way she snuggled into the long easy chair and rested her red-gold head against the peacock blue and bronze of her pet pillows revealed her actual need of rest, of relaxing, of throwing off as much as possible the strain which was killing her. Physical—mental—spiritual—it was a strain composed of all these—a strain of long standing.

"She is like a harp of many strings—born to yield enthralling melodies," thought Wills—"but every string is taut."

And of what use is a harp—with broken strings?

Henriette tucked a delicate silk robe the color and with the fragrance of wood violets about her mistress's knees and then discreetly pattered out, closing the door carefully which led into the more intimate portions of the apartment.

Alone, Orchid and the big man again regarded each other in a pulsing silence, each loath to trust the clumsy vehicle of guarded speech.

Again the woman made the effort.

"Well?" she inquired wonderingly with her bewitching drawl which lingered long in memory, "why are you here?"

"You think I have disobeyed—that I have come when your highness commanded me not to?"

"What else am I to think?"

"What would you say if I told you it is mere accident—my being here with you alone?"

"Is it?"

"I called to see Mr. Mayne, Orchid."

"Oh!"

"They told me at the desk that he was not at home—but that you were. 'Then,' I said, 'announce me to Mrs. Mayne.' I had no idea you would see me—but here I am!"

She sat up slowly and spoke slowly as if greatly puzzled. "It's odd you should come here to see Win. It's odd you should have thought he would be here at this hour. I believe I told you once he never came in before seven."

"I had reason to believe I might find him here—and I also had reason to believe I would not find you—since I happened to have been told you were in Rye."

"I came home a little sooner than I expected. I was visiting the Dan Lowries. They had heard I was not well and begged me to come out for some fresh air. They didn't want to let me go but I was uneasy. I simply had to come back. But—whoever told you I was in Rye? It couldn't have been Henriette, for she was with me."

Wills considered carefully. He was still standing, still studying Orchid. Was it possible she could regard him with that childlike candor, that adorable innocence of demeanor—if she were guilty of the infamy of which Mayne had accused her?

If guilty—he would have no mercy—for she would be like a poison flower breathing death into the lips which caressed it. But how could he conceive her guilty with those frank, child-like eyes lifted to his?

He must not shock her—he must give her the benefit of the doubt prompted by his longing to believe her true. But he must know. If guilty and capable of selling his soul which he had poured out in his letters to her, she was capable of worse. And his reputation was at stake. Susceptible as he had always been to the beauty and loveliness of women—not one had ever been able to make him jeopardize his name or fame.

No thrall had ever been so great as the thrall of his pride.

If Orchid was guilty—down with Orchid! He would taunt her with his bargain, with having bought her from Mayne for the price of the letters. He would trample on her with his contempt—annihilate her with the knowledge that she was deserted by the man who had sold her—and also by the man who had bought!

Orchid sensed a riot of tumultuous speculations.

"Whoever told you I was in Rye?" she repeated.

"Mayne."

"Win! When did you see him?"

"He came to my house early this afternoon."

"Brett! What is wrong? Win is in trouble again?"

Wills' face became inflexibly grim. "Orchid—I am not prepared at the moment to tell you—anything. I am only prepared to question you."

"Ask me—anything. Anything!" cried Orchid eagerly, clasping her nervous little hands tightly and holding them out toward him pleadingly.

"First—when did you come back from Rye—I mean—about how soon before I came up?"

"Oh—fifteen minutes maybe. Just long enough to change from my street dress to negligée."

"Then," mused Wills, "Mayne either got away before you came—or before—I happened in."

Orchid's eyes flashed. The temper he used to tease into being now leaped angrily. "What are you insinuating? That Win has been here? That I am aware of it? That I lied to you? What is it all about? What have you come here for? I am in no mood to be tortured. Speak out!"

It was a command but he was not ready to "speak out."

"I am in the dark, Orchid"—he was very gentle now and her anger died instantly—"you must help me out."

"Very well."

"I discovered this afternoon," he said

bluntly, "that my letters to you—had not been destroyed."

"Win—" she whispered. Then, "But how could he know?"

"Is it true?"

"Yes—it is true."

"You promised to burn them."

"I tried—but I—couldn't," she confessed falteringly.

"They must be destroyed," he pronounced inexorably, "get them."

She extricated herself gracefully from the silken coverlet and rose unhesitatingly. "Pardon me a few moments. They are in the wall safe in my bedroom."

Like an obedient child she went in to do his bidding.

Presently Wills heard a cry—of astonishment—of horror—then a hurried, dismayed colloquy in rapid French between Orchid and Henriette.

Wills followed down the little hall and into Orchid's bedroom.

Orchid was standing before the wall-safe—staring into it—aghast—her trembling hands futilely searching the vacant compartments.

"Empty!" she said over and over—unbelieving—stunned.

Wills approached. "Who knew the combination beside yourself?" he asked in a quieting, matter-of-fact way. He wanted her to turn. He wanted to see her eyes—to compel them to tell him the truth. Was she innocent? Was she guilty? Was she a supreme actress or a woman frightfully wronged?

But Orchid did not turn. Did not answer. She was leaning forward intently, her eyes wide with sudden comprehension. One searching finger had touched a tiny object. She picked it up. It was a small sapphire.

She turned then and with a bitter little laugh held it out to Wills.

"This belonged—to the thief," she said. "It must have dropped from his scarfpin."

Henriette, who had been standing in the shadow, grew excited again and made a move forward as if to speak, then stopped abruptly as if in fear of betraying something inimical to Orchid.



"Empty!" she said over and over—unbelieving—stunned.

Wills had no scruples in questioning her. He must find out everything that could be found out. What did she know? He interrogated in rapid, perfect French.

Henriette remained stubbornly silent until Orchid commanded her sharply—

"Tell what you know, Henriette. Hold nothing back. This gentleman is my friend."

At that Henriette's tongue was loose enough. She loathed Winthorpe Mayne. This was her opportunity to present him in a bad light to one who might be of service to her mistress.

"This afternoon," she related fluently, "Marie, the house-maid, told me Monsieur Mayne came in, packed bags, sent trunks down—and left. He missed the blue stone of his scarf-pin. The telephone rang in his room. He came out

much excited. She was searching on the floor. He told her it did not matter—and hurried away. That is all."

"How long was this before you and Madame returned?" cross-examined Wills.

"A short time only," replied Henriette. "I found certain things in confusion in closets and bureau, and while you and Madame were occupied in the front room I went to complain to the housekeeper. I feared something wrong. That is all, Monsieur; I know nothing more."

"You have told me quite enough," sanctioned Wills.

There was no doubting the utter sincerity of Henriette. And now he wished to be alone with Orchid.

"May we talk now?" he asked with a little look toward the hovering maid,



who seemed undecided as to whether she was longer needed or not.

"Leave us, Henriette," murmured Orchid and the good woman disappeared into her room, which was originally intended as a dressing-room attached to my lady's boudoir. Mayne's bedroom was evidently located beyond that.

THE big man examined the sapphire setting on his palm without a word, then he in turn gazed comprehendingly into the empty safe. He suddenly realized that Mayne had not only filched the letters, but possibly all of Orchid's little treasure besides.

"What did he take?" he ventured to ask.

"Everything," she informed him, a frightened rush of words; "worst of all

—your letters—how will you ever forgive me?—then my small fund of ready money—negotiable securities—my jewels—the jewels he had given me, to be sure—but I had always looked upon them as protection—in time of need—"

No!—there was no mistaking Orchid. Here was a pathetic, frightened, helpless girl—if there ever was one. How pitiful it all was—the broken words—the blank bewilderment—the black abyss into which one knew she was blindly peering. And how frail—frail—frail—to cope with it all!

She went straight to Wills' heart with her appealing loveliness, her undisguised consternation over the appalling situation which had come upon her.

"This means," she whispered, as if to herself, "that Win has left me—deserted. . . ." She was arrested by the

look on Wills' face. "You know something about this?"

"Yes," he admitted. "That is why I am here. And now I am ready to tell you the part I played in your affairs to-day—but you must not keep on standing."

Even as he spoke, she swayed toward him. He caught her in his arms and laid her tenderly down upon the bed. There was a decanter and a thermos bottle, ice-cold, on a small table. He sniffed the decanter. Brandy. He poured a spoonful and held it to her lips. Then gave her water and in a few moments she was anxiously awaiting his information.

He sat down on the edge of the bed and took her hands closely in his and little by little repeated his interview with Mayne. . . .

When he had finished, she withdrew her hands forcibly and, shuddering, turned away with a low moan.

"You believed him—believed I sent him!"

"I did not know what to believe, Orchid." He looked down at the evidence with which he had illustrated his narrative, whimsically calling the revolver "Exhibit A," the letters "Exhibit B," the sapphire "Exhibit C."

"You believed me capable of a treachery like that!"

Wills could not lie to her.

"I did not believe or disbelieve. I did not know. Never in my life have I absolutely trusted any woman. One never knows what a woman is likely to do. Perhaps he held you up at the point of his revolver, too? Or perhaps you still cared enough for him to force my hand? He had sufficient influence over you to cause you to dismiss me in his favor. How could I tell—to what lengths you might go—in his behalf?"

"You weighed me in the balance," she declared, nodding her head hopelessly, "put your price upon me—and bargained!"

Her haunting blue-green eyes seemed to pierce him with their unfathomable scorn. He sought for extenuations.

"My only idea in making that bar-

gain," he assured her with convincing fervor, "was to use what weapons I held—in your defense—to free you from him. Surely you are through with him now?"

"Through with him!" she exclaimed with savage fire, revealing as she had never done before wounds which had lain deep in her. "The only reason I have clung and clung to the horror of my life with Win has been to save him from the very things which you see I was powerless to save him from—disgrace—and dishonor—"

"Fortunately these things," soothed Wills, "need never be known. It will be a matter between those whom he defrauded and—between us. In France he will have a chance to redeem his losses and repay his creditors. I have an idea he will walk straight. He's had a pretty bad scare."

"The coward! The coward!" she cried wildly, "to sell me as a cast-off—then rob me and leave me to fend for myself after all these years. Sink or swim? Why—he knows I haven't a chance—not a chance!"

"He can be made to repay—"

"Repay!—I don't know the law, but I do know him. He will threaten me in devious ways—but he will never repay. I can go to the gutter if I like—for all he cares."

She had not whined or weakly wept, but the convulsive hysteria which now shook her was dragged up from the areas of sordid sufferings and fierce, seething rebellions long, long suppressed. The tide of her indignation rose high—wave on wave. . . . The coward—the criminal coward!—to sap her to the roots—and fling her—to the dogs if need be. . . .

Wills tried to reason with her, but could not. . . . At last he touched a chord: "Of course you know in your heart I would never hold you to that absurd bargain. You are only waiting for me to say it. I took you from him—only—to give you back to yourself!"

The last seven words passed over her troubled spirit like a magic wand. A

faint hope began to kindle in her eyes, a little light of timidly returning faith. "You mean it?" she said tremulously, "that was your reason? You swear it?"

"I swear it. When he hid behind your skirts and offered you in exchange for his own yellow hide—I felt there was a rotten link in his story. I couldn't be sure until I proved it—heard your side—but something bigger than my own confusion guided me—guided me here to see whether he had kept the letter of the contract in regard to packing his traps and getting away without seeing you—and has guided me in every word of our interview. Just as clearly as a seer is said to read the truth in a crystal—I read the truth in you. And I always did—until the letters were thrust in my face. . . ." He took one of her hands in his—"Forgive me!"

Orchid did not answer him directly, but with a tender smile "thought aloud" for him as of old. "Yes—you always trusted me—and you never trusted him. Yet you loaned him money. How much I do not know. Large sums perhaps. For one reason only—to keep me from—privation. It was a long time before I found it out. When I did, I tried to put a stop to it. It was then he first began to threaten me."

"Threaten?"

"You see, he was flattered in the beginning that a big man like you should take such a vital interest in his affairs. Then he imposed upon you—more and more. Then I found it out. But before that he—"

"Realized—I loved you?"

"Yes—he's keen."

"Too keen not to have known the restricted nature of our friendship—"

"He was perfectly certain I had never deceived him in the accepted sense of the word."

"And he was also perfectly cognizant that you would never double-cross him while you remained under his roof."

"Yes—but in order to bleed you he kept me in a constant state of terror—"

"He abused you!"

"He did everything a man can do to subjugate a woman. He did everything

he could to break my morale—to kill my self-esteem—by taints and insults and threats—"

The racking sobs broke through again.

"Blackguard!" cried Wills, rising and unconsciously assuming the attitude, the expression of one about to wreak primitive vengeance. It was plain. Murder was in him. For this blackmailer, this thief—this low, lying beast. . . .

Wills had never had the slightest sympathy with violence—but he understood it now. The domination of the reasoning faculty, which was his god, seemed not more important at this moment than the domination of primal instinct—a man in defense of his woman—a woman in defense of herself even as she defended her sacred young.

Orchid saw and inwardly rejoiced, but reached out to grasp the hand nearest her, to draw his mind in her direction. "Don't!" she whispered. "He isn't worth it. He's gone. You've dispensed with him. He has done his very worst. We are—through with him!"

Wills leveled upon her that singularly direct scrutiny of his. "Irrevocably? If he redeems not only his pledges but himself?"

Orchid dropped his hand and flung out her arms with a hard, scornful laugh—not pleasant to hear. "You think I would go back to him—after today? I shall never go back—after today." She glanced with narrowed lids toward the rifled safe. "It isn't only that he's taken every penny I had and lost it, that he's bought himself out of prison with my body, that he's tricked me again and again—he's taken everything—health—courage—love of life—everything. . . ."

With a gesture of despair she buried her drawn young face in the pillows.

Reproaching himself bitterly for bringing this black mood upon her again, Wills bent over her and tried to comfort her. But she would not stir, would not respond. So he seated himself beside her and gathered her as he might an exhausted, hurt, deserted child into the enveloping clasp of his

arms. He rested her red-gold head against his broad shoulder and she, too weary to resist, listened half-drowsily as he spoke with a tender cadence he had never used in all his life to any woman before—

"I, too, am very tired, very unhappy, little playmate. Don't you think we could help each other? . . . We both need rest. I'm going away soon—and I'm not likely to come back. Angus MacNeil is dining with me tonight—to talk over the arrangement of all my affairs. I shall be very, very lonely if I have to go by myself. . . . You've no idea what it would mean to me—if you would go with me, dear."

She drew herself out of his arms and sat up, gazing at him with a blinding whirl of conflicts shining from her eyes. "Go with you—how could I?"

"There would be nothing to fear—nothing unpleasant," he smiled with a world of assurance. "We would give no occasion for gossip. And I could look after you. Heaven knows you need looking after!"

"Heaven knows I want looking after," she agreed with a wisp of a laugh, "but—"

"But what?"

"There's simply nothing to do about it. However irksome the tie—we're tied. Both of us."

"With no bonds of even ordinary affection," he contested. "We both know that. And we've both paid a heavy price for a little happiness. Besides—no one is going to be hurt. And surely not you—I'll see to that."

Orchid involuntarily gazed down at her delicate hands and cast a sudden look into the mirror which reflected her wan face and wasting figure. With a long sigh that seemed to be fraught with physical pain as if it were a great effort merely to breathe, she nestled back into her pillows and closed her eyes.

Wills saw that she was thinking—thinking. . . . It was not difficult for him to read her mind. The clear beauty of her mental processes had always been a delight to him. Orchid never beat

about the bush, never chased the devil about a stump either for her own benefit or that of anyone else. She faced issues. Told the truth first to herself, then to whomever required the truth from her.

He saw that she was thinking—something like this:

"I have no money—no strength. No way of earning my living even if I were to get well enough. . . . And I never will get well—if I worry—if I am hard-worked and under-nourished. My lungs are weak. I can save them—but not if I take the hard, stoney way. . . . I'd like to be game—to fight it out—alone . . . but—how can I?" . . .

Slow, unwilling tears coursed down her face, not of self-pity—but of sheer defeat.

WILLS did not argue, did not urge, did not even touch her hand. He merely leaned forward and asked with simple earnestness—

"Do you still love me, Orchid?"

She opened her eyes. "You know—"

"Then make me happy for the little time I have left."

A pause, then an impulsive—"You really think I could?"

Again he cradled her in his arms. "If not you—no one!" he vowed. Then more lightly, "Shall I tell you how we are going to run away from the mad and meaningless throng?"

"Yes," she murmured softly, allowing herself to drift into his mood.

"We are going a-cruising in my yacht first. — You and the yacht were always great pals — remember? — when we went on little sails — you and I and the others?"

"Yes — it was always perfect aboard the yacht — no time to think."

"This time it will be more perfect—for there will be — no others — only you and I—the crew, Henriette and Merrick. — Possibly Doctor Tanner."

"Too wonderful. . . ." breathed Orchid.

"It has been my pet idea for a long time," confessed the big man, "—a

dream I never dared hope to realize. But you see—" he laughed happily, "Fate has been cruel this day — only to be kind!"



Chapter Five

HE had scarcely spoken when both became suddenly aware of an intruding presence. Wills' back was to the hallway—but Orchid faced it—and saw. . . .

She lifted herself half-fainting out of Wills' arms and fell back against her pillows—as if she had inhaled a poisonous vapor.

Wills sprang to his feet and turned—

Evalyn was leaning over the tabouret upon which he had laid the letters. With a deft move she slipped them into her handbag and passed them to one of the two keen-eyed men who gazed professionally into the dainty bedroom from the peacock-blue and bronze-hung doorway.

Wills seemed paralyzed. Never would he have believed Evalyn capable of this, of subjecting a woman she did not know to be guilty—and who was indeed so pathetically guiltless!—to the shame of such an encounter.

Evalyn!—with her excessive refinements, her abhorrence of the slightest vulgarity, her high hedges of exclusion!

He stood as if turned to stone.

Evalyn Wills was ashen pale. She seemed to be acting under some ruthlessly driving inner necessity. She did not glance toward the stricken girl crouched in among the silken pillows but with a slight inclination of her head beckoned Wills to follow her into the living-room. At another signal from her the two men discreetly withdrew into the outside hall.

Facing each other alone, Evalyn said in a colorless yet somehow reaching tone, "I waited and waited for your telephone call—at the Biltmore.—It did not come.—I—warned you."

"But this!" exclaimed Wills in gasping breaths. "My God! I never would

have believed it possible." He was still too shocked for articulate expression.

Evalyn now handed him a latchkey which she took from the pocket of her coat.

He looked at it questioningly. "What is this?"

"The key to this apartment—Winthorpe Mayne's."

"Mayne's—" His eyes flashed. What further treachery had that unscrupulous cad been perpetrating?

"Let me go back," Evalyn proceeded, "to your argument with Mayne this afternoon. You may as well know I slipped behind the drawing-room portieres instead of going directly out. The folding doors were partly shut so that I could not be seen by John in the hall. My object was to come to your assistance again if necessary. I had no idea of what I was about to hear. I—was a witness to your bargain with Mayne. After your agreement, I slipped out into the hall and upstairs. I had my clue—if I wished to use it."

"It was then you wrote the note asking me to call you at the Biltmore?"

"Yes. If you had called me—had given in—I intended to take the next train out to Windy Cliff. As it was—I tried to get Winthorpe Mayne at his office. He was not in. Then I called—here."

"Yes," mused Wills, "that was why he hurried away. . . ." No wonder—he thought. The scoundrel knew that with Evalyn as an ally he had a strangle hold on him.

"All I wanted from him was his latchkey—"

"You had no trouble getting it?" interrupted Wills, astounded at her courage.

"He could not very well refuse," said Evalyn, "for I had seen and heard too much. And," she added, "in justice to myself, you must know I made no explanations. He had seen me interfere this afternoon. I hoped he would infer I was your agent.—He could not possibly infer I had another object."

Wills inclined his head in recognition of her attempt to palliate the situation somewhat.

"Besides," concluded Evalyn, "—he is extremely hard up."

"You gave him money?"

"No. But the fact that he is at his wits' end and that the Consolidated contract means everything to him—made him extremely easy of approach."

Wills could not understand her. Realized that he had never known her. This woman so brilliant in tactics, so masterful in her supreme emergency. "Why," he asked wonderingly, "do you give the key up to me?"

"Because I have no further use for it—and because I think it is safer in your hands—than in Mayne's."

Wills started. "You do not suppose—"

"That he would attempt to return to the apartment once more? No.—But can one ever tell what a criminal will do?"

He stood considering this concentratedly, hardly noting her movement to the door. In a moment she had returned to him with the letters which had played so fateful a part tightly clasped in her hands.

"Brett," she said, her tone very low and strained, "you left me no alternative.—I had to do—what I have done. . . . If—however, you will only change your mind, if you will only consent to my freedom—I shall be immeasurably glad—to place the matter entirely in your hands."

Wills bowed his head. "—I will arrange."

Then Evalyn placed the letters in his hands. "They cannot be of any service to me now," she said. "You never break your word.—I know you will do as you say."

"Thank you," said Wills sincerely, this time carefully stowing the letters in an inside pocket. He could not but appreciate the genuine tribute of Evalyn's faith in the big side of his nature, her willingness to trust him to the extent of yielding up unqualified evidence of his devotion to another woman, com-

promising phrases which might be twisted into any interpretation if they were subjected to the public scrutiny.

On the other hand Evalyn knew what it cost this far-famed warrior who had fought such prodigious battles in the world of affairs to bend his knee before an adversary, but he was doing it without a murmur as he had always met the inevitable—once he knew himself irretrievably beaten. . . .

"I am off for Windy Cliff now," announced Evalyn, about to leave, "—and I shall remain there quietly—until I am free."

He inclined his head again in silent assent. Then—a sudden thought—"One more question, Evalyn. How could you possibly have known I would be here?"

"By sheer accident. Not hearing from you, I called up again at home.—You had left. But you had given John instructions where Angus MacNeil could reach you by telephone. John, not knowing he was betraying anything—gave me the address.—That is all."

WILLS STIFLED a deep sigh. How strangely the links fitted into each other—the links of a chain which was binding him—to what?—leading him—where? . . .

Evalyn was at the moment of departure. She could not offer her hand—she did not express regret or remorse other than that which she subtly conveyed by a manner, an air of inward suffering—for the necessity to which she had been put, the shame from which she, with her strange hyper-aristocratic viewpoint, would with difficulty emerge.

She looked gravely into Wills' strong, stern face and he looked at her with spirit that reached back into the ten years of their association and returned to find her now—a stranger. There were no words to be said between these two.—It was finished.

As unobtrusively as she came—like a silent instrument of some decreeing Power—so unobtrusively did she leave and oddly enough—in spite of the in-

conceivable occasion—because she was Evalyn—the high hedge still remained! . . .

WILLS looked down at the latch-key in his hand. He would say nothing about it to Orchid. He could at least spare her that. What a fool he had been to instruct Merrick to wait in the car. Evalyn and her assistants had been shrewd enough to avoid the front entrance and had come in at the side. If Merrick had been stationed in the foyer he might have been warned. Well—that was past. Nothing could be done about it now. At least Mayne was deprived of his key and that was a relief. Still—Wills' distrust of the man was too great to permit of an easy mind.

He re-entered Orchid's bedroom, found her as before crumpled in among the pillows, very, very still, as if the harsh winds that had blown over her had left her too weak for further effort—no matter what befell.

The big man went to the window opposite her bed and opened it wide. A soft breeze came gratefully in and fanned her wan face and played with the red-gold curls.

Wills stood looking out, drinking in the life-giving air and pondering sternly upon the cold facts facing him. Devastating storm was beating against his ordered regime. The strong, slowly reared bulwarks of his life appeared to be tearing asunder.

He stood there suffering. Presently he realized that Orchid was standing by his side. He slipped his arm about her.

"God knows," he blurted out, "I'd give my right hand to have spared you."

"If I could only understand," she said pitifully.

WILLS explained Evalyn's reason for breaking in upon him as she had. "She wanted her absolute freedom," he concluded, "and took this way of getting it."

Orchid made no comment. What comment was there to make? From the

look she had caught in Evalyn Wills' tense face she had read the desperation which had driven her. There was no personal malice. It was as if a steam-roller had to make smooth a way. Whatever was in the path of the rollers—would be crushed.

"She offered to turn the matter over to me—" continued Wills, "if I gave in.—I have done so. There will be no scandal.—But we will have to give up our plans for the present, dear."

There was a knock at the dressing-room door. Orchid opened it. Henriette stood there with a tea-tray.

"Take it into the front room," said Orchid.

Over the tea which seemed to brace them both, Orchid said tentatively—

"Not only she—but you, too, Brett—you will be free."

He understood. And did not dissemble. "I shall not marry again, Orchid—if I live after the decree. That will be disrupting enough."

"You think that marrying again—would hurt your reputation?" she smiled—a twisted little smile.

"There would be the usual gossip. Why court it? Why not live my life out quietly now—to the end?"

"The proposition remains the same then," queried Orchid, gazing absently at the tea-leaves in her cup.

"Yes, dear."

Again the acrid little smile.

Wills lifted her hand to his lips and kissed it reassuringly. "You will never regret it," he promised. "And I shall be free, you see, to do for you—all that I wish. Trust me."

But he couldn't meet her eyes. He strode to the opposite side of the room and stood with his back to her trying to strangle his conscience.

Two women today had appealed to the highest in him. Each had been denied. One had already coerced him.

Could he face scandalous interpretations?—lay his heart open to the public gaze—to make things easier for Orchid?

When he came back to her, Orchid knew that he could not.

"I am to be?" she whispered, "—merely—one more woman in your life?"

"The only woman who ever touched my heart," he replied gallantly and with truth.

"Have you ever thought of sacrificing anything for a woman, Brett?" she asked wistfully and a trifle curiously too.

"I can't say that I have."

"Pride has always been your master?"

"Necessity, perhaps," he corrected. "If you will only trust me," he reiterated warmly with a tremendous desire to impress upon her his intention of making up to her in lesser ways for the great refusal, "you will never regret your choice."

Orchid perceived it was futile to pursue the issue further.

"Well," she capitulated, for the first time wholly realizing the wisdom of the old, old adage, "—beggars can't be choosers."

Her last words gave Wills an opportunity for which he had been waiting. "There is another matter, Orchid. . . . When I came here to see if Mayne had been and gone—I stopped at my bank to get some money and bonds. I did not know of course that I would find you here—I intended to take them home and put them in my safe in your name. I also wanted to talk over another settlement with MacNeil tonight before acquainting you of what I had done. But now that you are here—that simplifies."

He took out his capacious wallet. "Here are ten one thousand dollar bills and fifty thousand dollars in Liberty Bonds—"

"I couldn't—couldn't—" cried Orchid, shying away and burying her face in her hands.

"Don't be foolish child," he urged, "let us face facts. Mayne has left you high and dry. In the circumstances—we are glad that he has for now you have nothing whatever to be grateful for. You owe him nothing.—He owes you everything.—You belong to me,

now—thank God—and it is my privilege to be responsible for you."

She laid her hands lightly on his arms. "Please—please—not now.—Later perhaps—when we go away," she besought him.

"Listen to me, dear," he insisted, "let us look upon this like two rational beings who know only too well what tricks Destiny can play.—This afternoon is proof enough—of the precariousness of all human plans. Consider too—I am without any question a man whose days are numbered. My heart is disabled. It may go back on me in any hour. I have Doctor Tanner's word for that. Suppose I should not live until the morning? Can't you realize how great would be my anguish at the last if I felt you were left to struggle it out alone in a world like this?—with not a penny back of you to tide you over?—You with your own life hanging on a thread?"

"But—" she faltered—"I've never taken—money—from anyone—except —"

He shook his head and said reproachfully, "Does it cost you more to take it from the man who loves you than to have taken it from the man—"

"No!" cried Orchid seeing clearly that if she could just waive away conventional objections—just accept the situation finally in all its aspects—believe with all her soul that Wills was doing everything he could from his own standpoint and she everything she could if she did not let herself drift down into a too tragic death—she saw clearly that the big man had the best of any feeble argument she could put to him.

He saw that he had conquered. "Come, dear, let us lock up these useful standbys. I will know then that whatever happens to me—my little Orchid will not be at the immediate mercy of the wolves."

"It is the first time since my marriage," she confessed, thinking it due, "that I have stood on anything but quicksand."

He took her in his arms. "Tell me it

doesn't hurt you to let me take care of you," he pleaded.

"I love you," she answered him almost inaudibly in a tone which made him realize she now gave herself utterly to him, gave up safe-keeping utterly into his hands.

He laid his cheek against hers caressingly. "You will never, never be sorry for that!" he swore to her. "I shall spend most of my time from now on planning how to make you happy!"

He did not see the expression of the flower face against his own, the quick tears that gathered but did not fall, the swift pressure of pearly teeth on quivering underlip. For he released her to place the bonds and bills carefully in the wall-safe.

"Be a good girl and bank these the first thing in the morning," he commanded.

She nodded—and gave him the smile he waited for.

Wills tucked her arm in his and led her out into the front room.

In a few minutes he was kissing her "goodnight," holding her closely and whispering comforting dreams of happiness to cheer her when he left, for he felt keenly the forlornness of her situation—alone in the deserted apartment, the little peacock-blue and bronze-hung suite throbbing and vibrant with the tense clashing of life on life within the past two hours.

How he hated to leave her!—Within him was a deep stirring ache to remain at all costs or carry her away with him. But—he sternly reminded himself—Angus MacNeil was waiting for him and there were crucial matters to attend to. Yet—. It seemed impossible for him to leave. He seemed held as by a leaden weight. She was so helpless—so frail. . . . Then an idea flashed. He sighed, then laughed a little. The weight lifted. . . .

A last swift kiss almost brutal in its effort to convey a thousand unspoken things and he forced himself to go quickly from her—her brave eyes, her sweet lips haunting him all the lonely drive home. . . .

Chapter Six

MACNEIL and Wills came up to the big man's study for their coffee.

MacNeil gladly took one of the choice strong cigars Merrick proffered. He felt that he needed extra stimulus. His client, who was also his friend, worried him. Not merely that he had eaten nothing and spoken little during dinner. He had often been moody and MacNeil was rarely a talker himself. Their very silent hours together had cemented the bond between them.

No—clearly something of vital import had occurred. Wills was merely turning it over in his mind before divulging it. With canny insight, the Scotchman guessed he was in for a knotty problem. Well—they had smoothed out many a tangled thread in the past. Surely they were equal to this. What made MacNeil uneasy were the burning spots of colour in Wills' cheeks, the fevered shining of the eyes which usually looked out in watchful quietude upon the seething world.

As for Wills, he was supremely conscious of but one desire. To calm himself sufficiently to present his case in all its angles to his only confidant. He could lean on Angus MacNeil. He could be certain to obtain from him wise counsel, cool judgment. If his lonely spirit yearned for a more definite knowledge of his friend's true feeling for him some substantial pure affection to lay hold of in desolate hours, his mind bowed always before the allegiance of the man as his attorney.

Covertly he measured him now. A man of less than forty-five, born in Scotland and educated there, a man of high gifts and baffling nature. Very tall and straight and good-looking with fine features and quiet grey eyes that told no tales, he was a man to be reckoned with in all contingencies, a man to be relied upon when once his interest was engaged.

Undemonstrative to a fault, unrevealing as to his personal life to an astonishing extent, he fascinated Wills

and held his friendship through all the vicissitudes of the years. For on occasion the two men did not agree. There had been breaks from time to time. But when the big man reached out to him again MacNeil had buried the hatchet and returned, laboring with as great a zeal as ever in the question involved.

Was it all merely ulterior motive, the opportunities, the wealth he had accumulated in his association with a very rich man? Wills looked at him and wondered. . . .

MERRICK hesitantly offered Wills a cigar. He shook his head.

"You're not smoking?" inquired MacNeil, surprised.

"Tanner keeps chopping an item off my list every day," laughed Wills ruefully, "soon there'll be nothing left."

He took out his gold cigarette case, opened it and selected a cigarette.

Merrick, having served the coffee, left them.

The two men smoked for a while in silence and then Wills recounted simply his day's experience from the time of his first interview with Evalyn up to his parting with Orchid.

And again they sat and smoked.

Merrick had had a log fire kindled. Finally Wills strolled over to its pleasant warmth. It had been raining during dinner and the room felt damp and a little cold.

MacNeil now understood the sudden accessions from fever to chill. Knowing Wills as he alone knew him, the imminence of inevitable gossip, the likelihood of raking up old enmities and buried episodes were quite enough to overcloud his evening. There was one thing he could do immediately however to minimize the danger and MacNeil suggested it.

"Having recovered the letters for the second time," he said crisply, "—why not get them out of the way?" Wills lifted his head. "There's a perfectly good fire there," the attorney added.

Wills took them out, untied them, threw them one by one into the leaping flames. . . .

MacNeil waited until he had completed the holocaust.

Then, "I never would have believed it of Evalyn Wills," he said, "but one can't account for women, can one?"

"I always thought I could account for Evalyn," replied Wills, "but women are strangely brave—in love."

As he said it he was thinking of Orchid as she had last looked at him with reckless newborn courage in her eyes.

"Have you the least idea who the man is?" inquired MacNeil referring to Evalyn.

"Not the least.—Nor shall I concern myself," answered his client, "I should never use it against her. She was at liberty to do as she pleased."

"So long as she remained with you," reminded MacNeil, "but now that she no longer remains?"

"I pledged her my word she was to have her way—that is settled," said Wills firmly.

"You are generous."

"Not at all.—I couldn't help myself. She forced my hand. But now that she's got the best of me I'm not going to welch. I'm not saying I admire her method but I do rather admire her for getting what she went after!"

MacNeil smiled broadly at that. The statement was so intensely characteristic. "You've always got what you went after, haven't you?" he laughed.

Wills considered. "It's a good deal to say on your fiftieth birthday, Mac—but I believe I've had about everything.—Not that I've never had to wait or that what I wanted came to me always in the way I might have chosen—but what I *willed*—I *had*. What my brain—or my eye—or my heart—was set on—my hand—took."

"Ever curse your luck?" asked MacNeil humorously.

"Many a time," smiled the big man, "but the sense of power compensated." Tapping the ruby-studded words on his cigarette-case, he added. "'Take and pay'—my creed, remember. Take—pay—and never whine!"

"Big creed!—and you've lived it," said his friend, adding with a touch of

mysticism, "as a matter of fact—we all take—and we all pay—only some of us never wake up to it.—In heart's blood—of life-blood—by the sweat of our brows—in one way or another when the bill's due—we *pay!*" Then he broke off abruptly—"But to return—I'm glad to see you take this coup of Evalyn's so philosophically."

"Not philosophically," contradicted Wills dryly, "far from that. But she has beaten me. I have to face the situation as it stands. She has upset me—all my plans. She has put me on my wits—and yours.—But she has my word. I can't retract."

"You could never have made the domestic equation after her confession to you today," consoled MacNeil, "the ease and tranquillity of the past would have been gone. So let us turn our backs on it and arrange for the future!"

"My future," remarked Wills, "is in my past. In a few important enterprises which may mean something to the younger generation. Other than that—for me—a remnant of precarious days."

It was spoken lightly but the undercurrent of melancholy was only too apparent.

"No wonder you are in this frame of mind. Who wouldn't be after such a day?" growled MacNeil. "Come—sit down.—Are you allowed a liqueur?"

"No," said Wills, "—but I'll have one. What difference does it make?"

MacNeil hesitated about pouring it so Wills did it himself and sipped thoughtfully as he broached a subject vital to him.

"I've gone over my will as you've drawn and corrected it and believe it is now ready for signature. I've also made a number of notes on other matters. You'll find them in the middle drawer."

The attorney seated himself at the desk-table and finding the will and other documents laid them before him, studying them keenly as he awaited further commands.

"Everything is covered, I believe," said his client. "All bequests, my wishes in regard to the Consolidated stock, the

S.S.—Aug.—7

college and church endowments—the hospitals—the farm experiment."

"Everything," said MacNeil, checking up.

"There are two or three settlements of a private nature. These I wish to attend to tonight."

"It's your birthday," protested MacNeil, "do wait till tomorrow.—You've had a rather full day as it is."

"No," refused Wills, "I want to clear my mind tonight.—Don't care to be haunted—in my dreams."

"In that case—" MacNeil laid before Wills the documents ready for signature. Wills scanned them rapidly with practiced eye and signed.

"Now," he said, relaxing, "we will take up the matter which most nearly concerns me—"

"Yes?"

The big man hesitated. He too had his tremendous reticences. But this had to be gone through. "I refer, of course, to the future of—Orchid Mayne."

"Before you decide what you are going to do," interrupted MacNeil, lighting another cigar, "I'd like a bit of a talk."

"Why not?" agreed Wills.

"You have capitulated in the most extraordinary manner to Mrs. Wills' remarriage. That is a big step toward your own happiness—if you choose to take it," began the attorney.

"I have told you frankly—I do."

"Not the step that will lead to—marriage."

"Certainly not!"

"I am speaking," said MacNeil slowly, "—of marriage."

"What has that to do with happiness?" asked Wills contemptuously.

"Nothing—necessarily," admitted his friend, "but I'm willing to wager that winding up your days with less than marriage—will not bring you the peace you imagine."

"This divorce is going to bring me all the annoyance I can stand," persisted Wills, "I shall not give the scandalmongers any more food for talk."

"I'm not thinking of you," said MacNeil unexpectedly, bringing his hand

down rather firmly on the polished surface of the table.

This took Wills off his feet. "Not thinking of me!—Who then?"

"Of—the one you have not given enough thought to—the woman, my friend."

"—Orchid?"

"Exactly."

"She was quite willing to leave everything to me," said Wills, wondering what the other was driving at.

"She was in no position to do otherwise, was she?"

This hit the mark. "No," said Wills, "but she is of the world. She understands my point of view."

"And cares enough to sacrifice her own?"

"She will not be sacrificed," returned Wills curtly.

"Has she ever had an affair of this character before?" MacNeil interrogated bluntly.

"No."

"How do you know?"

Wills considered that gravely. How did he know? "I know Orchid," he said at last.

The attorney smiled slightly. "That's it.—You *know*.—Know she is straight as a die. With love in her—a heap of it, I fancy. Love she's longing to give. And that you're willing to take at your own price—no matter what it does to her."

"She will not be hurt!" asserted Wills proudly.

"Impossible. Ten chances out of ten—someone will get wind of it. How will that be for her?—Then there's always the contingency of that hound's turning, you know—"

"Not if he values his hide!"

"He's as smooth as an eel. We might not be able to trace the source of the leak."

"At the moment," argued the big man, "he has all he can do to make good with the Consolidated. That will occupy his mind until we can formulate a plan to shut him up effectually for all time. You will admit that I have outwitted cleverer men than he?"

"Yes," conceded MacNeil, "you fought and laid low some of the best—and some of the worst. You are a big man—I have never seen anything in you to make me think otherwise. But—*what are you going to do—about Orchid Mayne?*"

"I am going to protect her—absolutely," promised Wills solemnly.

"Money alone will not protect her," declared MacNeil.

His attorney's opposition was so unlooked-for that it stayed the big man's anger. "What is your advice?" he demanded.

"Insist upon her divorcing Mayne," responded MacNeil coolly, "—then insist—upon her marrying you."

Wills rose—all antagonism now, fairly bristling with resentment. "What is this tack," he demanded, "what is Orchid Mayne to you?"

MacNeil hesitated. Then plunged: "I know her very slightly. The times that I have met her have been with you. Except once. When she came to my office."

"You have never told me of this," accused Wills shortly.

"No."

"Nor has she!"

"I advised her not to," announced MacNeil.

"Explain," said Wills evenly.

"It was when she discovered Mayne had been taking money from you. They had quarrelled over it. He was threatening her. She did not know where to turn. She knew I was your closest friend. She came to me—poured out her trouble—wept as I have never seen a woman weep. . . ."

"And then?"

"She told me she must break off her friendship with you—that it was imperative. If not, both your life and hers would be made unbearable."

"You counselled her to break with me?" cried Wills, enraged.

"Yes," replied MacNeil boldly, "—in the interest of both."

"And in the interest of both," inquired Wills cuttingly, "you now propose—marriage?"

"Just that."

Wills laughed uncertainly. "I have already been held up twice today. This is not another threat by any chance?"

The attorney took a deep puff or two. "I'm—not—so sure."

"Meaning?"

"I am free and unencumbered," mused the Scotchman aloud, "a bachelor, no entanglements—"

Wills caught the drift. "You are in love with her!"

MacNeil smiled—"I scarcely know her."

"Yet—"

"I've never cared enough for any woman to tie up—even temporarily," laughed MacNeil. "I'm considered hopelessly single. Still," he pursued whimsically, "there have been a good many MacNeils of my clan who have turned eccentric in one way or another."

Wills moved over to the hearth again. The fire was burning fitfully. He prodded it absently and stirred the ashes of his heart's outpourings which lay in light fairy-like heaps upon the glowing embers.

"You mean, I gather," he said at length without turning, "that you will attempt to take Orchid from me if—"

"If—necessary," MacNeil concluded sharply. "And I am not even in love with her," he reiterated, "—as yet. But she's far too sweet a human creature to crush in the hand as one might a trembling bird one had trapped—or a delicate flower—like this, for instance—"

He picked up the already drooping orchid in the fragile vase and crumpled it in his hand.

"My God!" cried Wills, taking an involuntary step forward. For an instant he had a piercing sense of Orchid herself being crushed out of existence.

MACNEIL observed with satisfaction that he had inflicted the exact degree of torture he intended.

"I'd go a long way," he stated

plainly, "to save her from a fate like that."

"In other words," challenged the big man, "if I do not marry her—you will?"

"If she will have me," said MacNeil modestly, smoking steadily away.

"There'll be no talk if I marry her—and if there is—what's it to me? And moreover there will be no need of any surreptitious settlement to insure her future.—I am, as you certainly are in a position to know—amply able to take care of her."

The effrontery of it! Wills hated MacNeil at this moment as he had never hated his ablest enemy.

"She is—aware—" he burst out chokingly.

"She knows nothing of this—how could she?" thrust back MacNeil sharply and Wills knew there was nothing but the truth in this man upon whom he had depended for years.

"I know that she loves you," he said deliberately, "and I want her to have what she loves—if it does not destroy her."

"How can you prevent it—if it is her desire to come to me?"

"I cannot.—But I can at least give her—a choice," said MacNeil, laying down his cigar stub and taking out his own pipe and tobacco.

Wills looked at his friend, studied him in this new light. Strange—while he intended as usual to have his way he could not but concede to the other a conception of conduct splendid to behold—"The eccentric MacNeils." Yes—he had heard them called so, but here there was something more than eccentricity—something which made the big man afraid.

In Angus MacNeil he now recognized a formidable rival—younger—with health, looks, charm—and no mean fortune to boot. Orchid would indeed have "a choice."

His anger rose. "You think you can offer what I can offer?" he put to him defiantly.

"Millions?—No," retorted MacNeil, "but you ask her to live with you

without marriage—and count it a privilege;—I shall ask her to marry me and call it a privilege—whether she lives with me or not.”

Wills was incredulous. “You would marry her—”

“And take care of her as if she were my child—until—”

“Until!” sneered Wills.

“Until,” repeated the habitually non-committal Scotchman, “she came to care for me. If,” he added softly, “that could ever be—” His voice trailed off and his keen eyes wonderfully filled with gentleness gazed ahead at some imaged vista which seemed to lead to unknown joy.

The man of millions paced the room in mounting irritation, the dull red spots high on his cheeks, his eyes burning. Every cell of his brain seemed tinglingly alive, his heart beat painfully. He felt like a drowning man whose whole past revolved before his mind with incredible swiftness. He had taken, taken—taken! and could count on the fingers of one hand the times he had been thwarted. Was there indeed a day of reckoning? Did an hour really arrive—now—or at some destined point along the Eternal Way—when the good deserved poured down in overflowing measure—the sum of a whole life’s striving?—did punishment for a thousand forgotten cruelties—the cruelties of the strong, the conquering, in their power over the helpless—of those who never counted as even worthy of compassion the heart-aches of the unimportant—accumulate, ripen and descend upon their heads—in some such hour as this? . . .

Why had Evalyn been impelled to him *this* day?—the day he was serenely mapping out a tranquil *finis* to the big, stormy, triumphant drama of his life?—Why had Mayne chosen the same day and why had Evalyn used him as an instrument in her ruthless dash for liberty?

Most galling of all why had MacNeil, who had stood like a granite pillar back of him so long—have failed him just today? Have presumed to weave

himself into the intricate pattern with the thread most precious to him of all?

This wrenched him back to Orchid. . . . To lose her now! To have her wrested from him—Orchid—so perfect to be loved with the tenderness with which he meant to love her—Orchid with whom he had planned a drifting dream—short but beyond description sweet. . . .

To have this taken from him at the last?—Could he bear it? Could he risk the loss of her by placing in her way a tempting choice—or should he yield the disputed point? . . . He did not know. His brain whirled and whirled. Over and over he questioned himself—but no answer came. . . .

Suddenly, sharply, in upon the turmoil broke the voice of MacNeil harsh with apprehension—“My God—man—what did you do with that revolver?”

“Revolver?” Wills came back confusedly.

“I’ve been reconstructing your experience in the Mayne apartment,” explained MacNeil swiftly, “from your entrance to your departure. It just occurred to me—did you bring that revolver of Mayne’s back with you?”

“No. But why—”

“What did you do with it?”

Wills thought back. “I set the letters on the tabouret—and the sapphire. . . . The revolver—Orchid took from me—”

“And—”

“Laid down beside her on the silk robe.”

“Afterwards?”

“After Evalyn left and I re-entered that room, I did not notice it in sight anywhere. We were busy discussing other things—it escaped my mind—” MacNeil’s evident uneasiness began to possess him also. “What is it you are afraid of?”

“I am uneasy, that’s all,” replied MacNeil evasively.

“No, it isn’t all,” contradicted Wills, “you think the revolver might suggest to her—” He could not say it.

“I think,” admitted the other, “that

with a loaded revolver close at hand—a woman of her type—in a moment of extreme despondency—

"She was anything but despondent when I left her," urged Wills eagerly, "no—I do not believe—"

"And then again," continued MacNeil, his trained mind ferreting out all possible hazards. "If Mayne by any chance returns—"

"He gave up his key," Wills informed him.

"They might have had others in the office. If not—the master-key."

"In any case," said Wills with a hard smile, "it wouldn't be very healthy for him to make the attempt."

MacNeil's face lit up. "You safeguarded her?"

"At least give me credit for a lively little foresight," snapped his client, "I admit that I slipped up on the revolver—but at least, by God, I telephoned Headquarters and had the apartment covered in case that yellow rat ever showed his face there again!"

"Had we better telephone Headquarters for a report?" suggested MacNeil.

"Headquarters is to inform me if anything of the slightest significance occurs. But—" he went on jerkily, "you have made me nervous. I'm going to call up Orchid."

He went to the telephone and was about to pick up the receiver when Merrick entered hurriedly. He was evidently making a great effort to conceal his agitation.

But Wills knew him too well. "What is it?" he demanded tartly.

"The French woman—Henriette—rang the bell of the front door, sir," stammered Merrick, "she would not come in but asked for you. John summoned me. I did not know her at first—for she was veiled. She apparently trusted me—for she handed me this package for you—and then tried to get away—"

"You detained her!"

"I felt there was something queer, sir. I asked her to wait for a message from you. She was frightened—tried

to escape. There is a cab waiting in front—"

"Anyone—in it?" faltered the big man.

"I could not see, sir. At any rate I gave John orders to detain her till I came down."

"Quite right," approved Wills as he unwrapped the package wrapped in a black silk scarf. It contained the bonds and bills lately deposited in Orchid's wall-safe!

"Send the woman up!" peremptorily commanded Wills.

Both his apprehension and his guest's increased with each waiting moment.

"Either she changed her mind about accepting the backing," reasoned the attorney, "or—"

Wills recalled the episode of the portrait, the mysterious impression of overhanging evil, recalled his poignant unwillingness to leave Orchid there alone. "No," he said with sick conviction, "something far more serious has been going on up there."

The study door opened. Merrick preceded Henriette who was haltingly followed by a fragile figure even more closely veiled than she.

"Orchid!" whispered Wills between dry lips. He went to her at once.

"Leave us, Merrick."

Orchid made a sign to Henriette, who deftly loosened her veil and took it off. She stood before the two men, her face not white as it had been in the afternoon but flushed an exquisite burning rose—the flush of highest tension. Her eyes stared ahead as if she were looking upon some terrible, some shocking sight; she shuddered violently as if it were actually before her; her delicate nostrils quivered and distended; her lips parted in horror; her hands—palms up with fingers wide-grooped out to push it from her—and suddenly her eyes closed tightly to shut it out as she gave a long broken moan of utter despair.

"For God's sake, Orchid, what is it?" cried Wills. "What has happened? Speak freely—there is no one to be afraid of here."

She half-leaned toward him and then



shrank back, slowly aware of the other presence.

"It's only MacNeil," reassured Wills. "Angus MacNeil—you know—my attorney—"

"MacNeil"—the name shot a quiver of light into her face. She turned toward him slowly as if feeling instinctively that he of all people in the world could save her—save her—from this ghastly spectre which stood menacing her path.

MacNeil took her hand firmly, impersonally in his.

"What is it, Mrs. Mayne?" he asked soothingly.

For answer she again shuddered away from him.

"You must tell us," he coaxed gently.

She turned her hands in his.

Wills approached her. "Orchid," he called softly.

She fluttered toward his voice, half held out her arms, then dropped them and sank limply into a chair MacNeil had drawn up for her. Her head dropped forward, her eyes gazed down at her tightly clasped and shaking hands.

Wills turned to Henriette. "What has happened?" he demanded in her own tongue.

Henriette was mute.

"We must know," added MacNeil sternly, "before we can be of any assistance."

Orchid raised her head. "Speak, Henriette," she said faintly.

Henriette, who had stood like a wooden image, instantly—if with caution—obeyed.

"Monsieur Mayne," she began hesitantly, "appeared—not long after you left, Monsieur."

Wills cast a swift look at MacNeil. So the Scotchman's uneasiness had some basis. "How did he get in?" he asked.

"Through the bedroom window, Monsieur."

"The bedroom window!"

"It was open."

Wills remembered. He had unlocked and opened it.

"That window on the balcony is usually locked," went on Henriette. "He must have come up the back stairs and entered through the kitchen door."

"That is probably what happened," remarked MacNeil.

"What else, Henriette?" urged Wills.

"His bedroom is beyond the dressing-room of Madame's suite which I occupy. He might have gone there—and

I would not have known. I brought in the tea—"

"Yes—yes—" prompted the big man impatiently.

"It was then he may have gone into my room and through my window on to the balcony which stretches from there across Madame's French windows."

Instantly Wills visualized Mayne listening from that balcony at the window's edge to his last talk with Orchid in her bedroom. He now went to the desk and picked up the returned bonds and bills. A nauseating fear entered into his soul.

What had happened?

Orchid was still drooping in the chair, again gazing down with wide, frightened eyes at her hands which by some rigid mental command she now had under fair control.

Wills drew her gently to her feet, then faced her grimly.

Few had been able to withstand his voice when it rang out sharply in a crisis.

"We must know, Orchid," he cried with a hard metallic click in each word. "What is it? I command you. Tell me!"

Suddenly her eyes met the big man's with the old brave directness and her lips moved freely in rapid speech.

"I—I was lying on my bed—exhausted—when he—Win—jumped down—softly—like a cat—from the window-seat. My eyes were closed. I did not hear him at first. Then I heard someone fumbling with the safe. That brought me up with a shock. I sprang from the bed. I fought him! I snatched the money—the bonds. We fought like panthers, but I had only my will to fight with—my little strength was going. He sprang at my throat—see—see the marks—I got away at last. He seized my wrists—I wrenched them from him—he caught them again and twisted them—he almost disabled me—but I would not give up!—I remembered the revolver. It had slipped under the silk coverlet. I reached out and grasped it. I aimed—but had not the strength to pull the trigger. He did not

know that—he sprang at me like a maniac and raised his fist to knock it out of my hand. . . . It—it—went off. He dropped—"

There was a pulsing pause.

"Dead?" cried both Wills and MacNeil, stunned. . . .

ORCHID trembled from head to foot, her breast heaved painfully as if each breath cost a pang unspeakable. "I—do not know," she gasped out, "there was a pounding at the door—some men burst in—but we had gone. . . . Henriette had caught up my cape and veil. We fled down the back stairs and out by the side to the street, hailed a taxi and came here. I was still clutching the packet which we wrapped in Henriette's black scarf. My one thought was to get them back to you. If they had been found they would have taken them, traced them back to you perhaps."

She was sobbing uncontrollably now, not only from cumulative nervous reaction but from sheer exhaustion. Wills led her compassionately back to her chair and rested his hand protectingly on her shoulder until the racking spell subsided.

At that moment Merrick knocked and hurriedly entered.

There was a low-toned conference with his master into which the attorney was drawn.

"They'd better come up," advised MacNeil.

"Right, Merrick," ordered Wills; "and bring my strychnine."

"You'd already had it, sir."

"You heard me."

"Is it best, sir?" pleaded Merrick.

"I am the judge," snapped Wills and Merrick bowed meekly and quickly went down.

Wills drew his chair close to Orchid's. MacNeil sat by the dying fire, brows knitted, all his force centered on ways and means of coming through this greatest of his client's difficulties with unsoiled colors.

All this time Henriette was huddled in a big chair in a shadowed corner.

"Henriette," called Wills, "bring Madame's cape and veil."

She came timorously toward him.

He rose. "Come, Orchid." Then to her servant, "Madame must rest for a few minutes, Henriette—there—on the divan—in the alcove. Mr. MacNeil and I have some private business to discuss—alone."

He and the faithful woman each took an arm of Orchid's who, unresisting, suffered herself to be led to the couch.

The heavy velvet portières were closed and Wills and his attorney were alone when Merrick came back with the two men from Headquarters.

Chapter Seven

WHILE the men seated themselves a trifle awkwardly in the presence of the two important personages to whom they were reporting, Merrick poured a wine-glassful of water from a carafe and administered the extra stimulant demanded.

Wills never quavered. What mighty effort of his gigantic will was holding up his nerves could only be surmised. Never had he appeared so strong—so invincible.

The detectives were two of the four detailed to watch for Mayne at the apartment. Headquarters had already been advised of what had taken place and the men in turn had been given their orders. Two stayed at the apartment and two were instructed to report to the big man at once and to repeat their statement without reservation.

"Dead?" was the first sharp question MacNeil shot at the chief detective.

"As a door-nail. Stone dead. We heard a quarrel, then a shot. We broke in. The safe was open, the bedroom in disorder. The man was down and out. The woman and her maid had blown."

"Any trace?" probed the attorney with blank face.

"Not a sign—but we'll get them," promised the man with a brutal set of

his jaw. "The lines are out all over the place."

"You think—she shot him?"

"Think! They weren't friendly. He was sailing in the morning with a Jane he's been going with for a year. The wife may have been ragging him over that. At any rate she skipped with the cash he tried to grab—but she made short work of him first."

"This is only a theory," said MacNeil smoothly; "the money may have belonged to her. And she may have killed him in self-defense. Or who knows? The revolver may have gone off by accident."

"Nothing of that kind," sneered the man from Headquarters. "Mayne was a skunk and a swindler. She's known it a long time—but she stuck. They usually travel in pairs, that breed."

"We'd better let the court decide that," cut in the attorney brusquely, rising.

The man got to his feet. "Oh, the court'll decide it all right. She hasn't a chance at getting away. We've plenty of clues," he bragged, "but naturally we're keeping things as quiet as we can—letting nothing leak to the press we can keep away from the news hounds."

"I daresay they're already on the trail?" interposed the big man.

"Hot on it—but there are certain inside tracks we're in the know about—and they're not. If they ever get on to those—" he paused. He had said enough.

The inside story! If they ever discovered it—how they would splash it with all the lurid color of the sensational press, how they would garble and defile it. Please God it would remain buried in the breasts of those who knew it! Such was Wills' fervent inward cry. For if ever those secret trails were blazed, his name would be bandied about on every tongue, his reputation a rag to flaunt so long as he lived in memory. For who would understand the quality of his love for Orchid? No one.

MacNeil saw that it was not well for the big man to hear more at present.

"If you will come downstairs with me," he suggested pleasantly to the detectives, "I'd like to question you further as to details. I am, as you know, acting for Mr. Wills. I'll also call up Headquarters. The imperative thing is to keep Mr. Wills' name out of this."

"Oh, his name will be out," assured the spokesman confidently. "The yellow sheets will be full of Mayne's mine swindle. That'll hold 'em for a while. Even if Mr. Wills is mentioned on the loans, they'll know he was taken in for once, that's all."

It was clear to both Wills and MacNeil that the man was completely ignorant of those angles of the affair which they were most desirous to conceal. Wills was devoutly thankful. So far—a degree of safety. He might not be in the least involved. He might stand clear of the whole thing. No sordid, low-down atmosphere would envelop him at this last lap of the race.

With craft, influence, unlimited money and the brain of Angus MacNeil at his command, what had he to fear? Everything, so far as he was concerned, would be hushed.

He stood very erect, offered the men a drink, cigars, shook hands with them. And then they went their way accompanied by the attorney whose bland ease was an altogether deceptive mask.

THEY had scarcely disappeared when Orchid issued from the alcove. For a few brief moments they would be alone. Wills thought of their tender parting at the threshold of what had been her home, thought of what lay there stark and dreadful in the hands of the county physician. Soon the extras would be calling raucously the news of the latest murder—for murder would the headlines read until murder was disproved.

Murder! What a word to be associated with that frail and lovely creature. . . . Soon the sensation-lovers would be crunching her name between their teeth. . . . And whatever the verdict the smirch would always be there.

They stood, as in her dainty parlor,

regarding each other. And as always, it was she who broke the tension.

"I heard it all," she said bravely, all the heroism in her coming to the fore, "and I'm not afraid. I know exactly what is before me, and I'm not in the least afraid. Not for myself. But," and here her lower lip quivered, "I couldn't bear to have you mixed up in it—in the tiniest degree. I don't care what they do to me—so long as you are out of it. It doesn't matter about my little life. But it does matter about your big one. My heart would be broken if you should be hurt through me. . . ."

Great tears slowly welled up and fell from the haunting eyes. . . . Wills felt the walls around the citadel of his being crumble into dust at the sweetness of her, the fine, high sacrifice. . . . As with MacNeil when he "turned eccentric" so now a slumbering spirit of chivalry awoke in Wills and struggled with the worldly part of him that proudly through the years had held the sceptre and wielded the lash.

He looked closely into her pleading, delicate flower face, into those blue-green shining eyes. . . . Swiftly—without warning or volition—all the imposing barriers of pride, fame, self-protection that had withstood all the battering of the years—melted away as if by sorcery and faded into nothingness. In the world there was only Orchid—Orchid in her loveliness, her frailty, her selflessness and her love for him.

With a free, wide, sudden sweep of his arms he gathered her in—close to his heart—"I care for nothing—nothing—" he cried recklessly, "nothing in all the world except to vindicate you. If I'm involved, I'm involved. It makes not the slightest difference, but you shall not suffer anything I can save you from suffering by standing openly and squarely back of you."

"No—no!" she begged.

"Yes," he insisted, "you must let us manage it, MacNeil and I. Every resource in my power is at your command. There is little question in my

mind that it can all be settled out of court—quietly—through the district attorney who was not only an associate of MacNeil's but is also a trusted friend. But in any case it makes no difference, I am with you in this—I am with you."

His lips sought hers in a long kiss of consecration, their first kiss of pure unadulterated passion—the passion that is truest love. . . .

She rested her head on his shoulder, dazed with the wonder of it and then he said to her, in the tone of a young knight on bended knees, "And when all is quiet in our lives again, we are going to realize our dream, my dearest. For you will be my wife then, will you not, dear? And we can go sailing where we please without a qualm of conscience!"

He said it lightly—laughed a little—but it was the supreme moment in his life. He had paid sacrifice for sacrifice, had risen to the summit of his nature, to the highest altitude his soul could ever reach.

And Orchid? Misty-eyed, she wound her slender arms about his neck and whispered, "I shall adore you for this, Brett—my big man, Brett—forever and forever. . . ."

A LIGHT tap at the door. A pause to give them time—and MacNeil entered.

He felt the aura which surrounded them and paled a little, but spoke cheerfully and with a heartening smile. "I have informed Headquarters as to my connection with the case in behalf of Mrs. Mayne and that I have an appointment with the district attorney. That will stop any further efforts on their part until they hear from him. They are well aware of our friendship and also that my word with him is one hundred percent."

Thus far he had addressed Wills. Now he spoke directly and somewhat severely to Orchid. "What you are going to do now, Mrs. Mayne, is to go with me to the district attorney and tell him your story—clearly—without hesi-

tation—exactly as I shall outline it for you on the way down. When you have told it, from whatever angle he attacks it, you never deviate, never swerve. This is a clear case of self-defense—altogether justifiable—and we can absolutely prove it. So there is nothing to fear. You will be dismissed—there will be no notoriety for you, for there was no evidence involving scandal in the apartment—no photographs, no letters, no damning evidence of any kind relating to you. What they will find of Mayne's I don't know. His known character, his promotion of the mine swindle, are both in your favor. We'll come through with flying colors."

"And her coming here is perfectly natural," added Wills, "for one thing to return the money and in the second place because—as she happened to know—her attorney was dining with me."

"Quite right," agreed MacNeil, "and now, Mrs. Mayne, will you get your things? The district attorney is waiting."

"And Henriëtte?"

"She must come, too."

Orchid went into the alcove. The velvet curtains fell behind her, leaving the two men alone.

"There is something I want to tell you before Orchid comes back, Angus," said Wills. "I have just asked her to be my wife. . . ."

MACNEIL took Wills' hand in his and grasped it more warmly than in all their years of association. "This is the biggest thing you've ever done, old friend," he said. "I congratulate you."

With another warm, close pressure, the Scotchman dropped Wills' hand and faced Orchid, who stood now caped and veiled with her maid before the heavy velvet portières. "I shall wait downstairs with Henriëtte," he told her and held the door open for the servant.

Once more Orchid and the big man stole a few sweet moments out of the heart of life. . . .

Then he saw her to the head of the

stairs and watched her as she went down to the attorney. . . .

He was still standing there when Merrick came up, his eyes a-dream.

MERRICK respectfully awaited his master's pleasure.

Realizing suddenly that Orchid and his friend were gone, Wills started to turn back into his study—a torrent of strange, exalting emotions madly surging through him.

In a moment, however, Merrick, alarmed, perceived that he was clinging desperately to the newel-post.

"What is it, sir?" he cried, supporting him.

"I'm dizzy, that's all. Better get me back into my study."

"Why not to bed, sir?" implored Merrick.

"Not yet."

He tried to walk alone, but staggered and almost fell. Merrick caught him and exerting all his strength succeeded in helping him to his big chair by the desk.

The big man felt suddenly stricken—shattered. He groaned aloud with the unthinkable anguish of the dagger-like thrusts which convulsed him.

Merrick poured some brandy, handed it to him. He tried to swallow it, could not, set it down.

Then the pain seemed to subside. He made an heroic attempt and took out his cigarette case—but could not open it. Merrick did so for him, selected a cigarette which Wills managed feebly to puff into a light at the match Merrick held. He reached out for the cigarette case and his man laid it gently in his hand. Wills turned it and read with an odd, wondering smile his creed—his inexorable creed. . . .

The pain took him again—rending currents of agony. He stifled a scream. . . . Again his attendant tried the brandy. This time Wills swallowed a little. Half-smiling, he whispered, "I'll not—get through—this night, my good—Merrick."

"That extra strychnine—" faltered his servant.

"Kept me going—as long as I did," said Wills faintly, and then his eyes shone with a beautiful thought—"Thank God," he repeated to himself, "I kept going—as long—as I did. . . ."

A terrific forked pain gouged through his heart. He clung hard to the heavy ledge of the desk in a colossal effort to bear it without crying out.

In terror Merrick rushed for the telephone in the alcove and waited impatiently till he could get Doctor Tanner. He could hear faint moans and smothered cries and once a dry sob and the one word, "Orchid"—then again the moans which made him shudder. . . .

When at last he could hurry back to the big man—he found him moaning no more. Indeed he was very quiet now and leaned heavily to one side. The cigarette was still lighted and was burning a hole in some document on the blotter.

Mechanically Merrick put it out and as he did so his eye caught the glimmer of the gold case which lay on the rug at Wills' feet. It must have slipped from his limp hand. . . .

In the amber rays of the desk-lamp its three ruby-studded words—"Take and Pay"—glinted and glistened. Dazed, hardly as yet comprehending, old Merrick stooped to pick it up and set it down reverently on the table beside his master. . . .

G O-GETTER: an energetic young man who doesn't know what to do with her when he has gone and got her.

She backed the wrong horse in the last race, and the wagers she had been "parlaying" went pouff! Then came a stroke of luck for Slim Lady—in the slender shape of a young man with a pair of binoculars and a sense of gratitude. . .



Slim LADY

By Nancy Hoyt

STEPHANIE moved away from the rail, feeling a profound discouragement. Slowly she tore up the useless mutuel tickets, orange pasteboards with a printed design in red on them, and threw away the program crumpled

in her hand. The sixth race, and not a cent left to back anything with! What luck, what filthy luck! All those long shots that she had made at first, and then the timid instinct to back the favorite, which had failed equally lament-

ably. Thirty dollars in worthless scraps fluttered to the ground, and she had less than thirty cents left in her purse. . . .

THE SULLEN roar of fury from the crowd, as the favorite came in next to last, subsided slowly. People jostled her aside and pushed on by at a run, holding colored slips in their hands. The stable boy next her at the rail, a red-faced youth in a dirty turtle-neck sweater, swore and spat neatly. He was a sinister looking young man of perhaps eighteen and heavy losses had made in-roads on his temper.

"An' Dolan said 'Follow Me' was a good number! Wait'll I wring that guy's neck. 'It's a sure thing,' he said. Hell! There wasn't anything followin' that horse but my eyes."

Misery loves company, but she was in very strange company indeed. The stable boy commiserated her on her bad fortune, adding details to the punishment he planned for Dolan. Around them the smell of dust and horses, of people in close-packed multitudes, combined with the fierce sunlight to produce an effect of intense heat. A handsome mulatto woman in elaborate garments jingled a well-filled gold meshbag. "Nigger movie star," announced the stable boy, indicating her. "Comes here every day."

The woman glared and took a roll of bills from her bag, counting them complacently before she snapped the catch again on them.

STEPHANIE sighed and walked away. She had lunched on one hot-dog and a lemonade, and now felt rather faint. She contrasted this present scene with the Jockey Club at Longchamps, or strawberries and cream in one of the club tents at Ascot, under striped awnings.

"*Sic transit*," she thought, looking ruefully at the tips of her black suede slippers, now ruined by the dust. "Think of the times you've been with me at the races, but not under these conditions, poor things. Ah, we've both seen better days."

She wandered off through the crowd, followed by the curious eyes of the stable boy, who, chewing a dejected bit of straw, mused momentarily on what she was doing here, a rail-bird, instead of being with the ladies and gents in the club enclosure. Then her tall slim figure, frocked in thin black crepe, and topped by an immense black horsehair hat, disappeared from view.

Stephanie wandered aimlessly toward the entrance of the grandstand. She had her ticket for a crowded day-coach back to Baltimore, and twenty-two cents in her purse. Yesterday her wrist-watch had followed other ornaments, and today the whole proceeds had gone *pouff!*—like dandelion fluff—in an hour, gently floating away.

Just as she turned into the entrance, she saw someone waving wildly to her from the club house porch. Startled, she stopped to look, and the man crossed into the stand, ran along the aisles, and came up next her.

He was a tall young man, of perhaps thirty, well-dressed and pleasantly "horsy" looking, whom she had noticed staring at her some time ago from the enclosure. His dark-blue suit, blue shirt, and spats, as well as the binoculars, slung over the shoulder, all bespoke the racing man. Impossible not to know from his weather-beaten countenance, no matter what part of the world you saw him, that this was his major interest.

Stephanie turned impatiently, and raised a pair of delicately haughty eyebrows. Even with twenty-two cents left as a working capital Stephanie could still look *grande dame*. The man flushed slightly, and raised his hat.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "but I really had to speak to you. You see, it's all through you that I happen to be holding these."

She stared.

"But I don't understand what you mean."

"A twenty-to-one shot," he said, and fanned out the orange tickets in his hand. Stephanie glanced quickly at

them. Ten ten-dollar tickets, straight, at twenty-to-one. Two thousand dollars, she computed, but what had it to do with her?

"If you'll come to the Club a moment I'll try to explain." He handed her an extra member's pass and they walked through into the cream paneled walls and chintz sofas of the upper room. The man ordered ginger ale and asked Stephanie if she'd rather have tea. The other people's trays with the cream-colored Wedgwood queens-ware looked attractive but she shook her head.

He was rather ill at ease.

"It's hard to tell you unless you understand just what a coincidence it was," he said, pouring out gin from an initialed flask into the tall glasses. "I was standing on the porch with the program in one hand and focusing these." He touched the binoculars. "You know how one thing stands out like a picture just as you adjust them? Well, I fiddled a second or two with them and as the thing turned you were suddenly there, standing very slim and aloof and looking straight at me. Of course, you were really just watching the crowd up here but from my end of the field glasses it seemed to me we were staring right at each other. For some reason it made a tremendous impression, some faint resemblance or familiarity your face had, and then the slightly sad, weary look. The people around you must have been short because you seemed to stand aloof and very tall among that pack at the rail. Well, I dropped the glasses and wondered why I felt that I'd seen you before. Then right out of the program page that name seemed to jump—'Slim Lady,' by Slim Chance out of Fair Lady, I think it was, and I ran like a crazy man to put a hundred dollars on her before the windows closed. When I got back to the porch I couldn't see you anywhere; the race had started and I suppose the crowd had packed in. Honestly, it was such a mad thing to do that I would have thought I dreamt it, except that there I was at the end of the race holding the winning tickets with everyone around me cursing at

the long shot for winning when they had nothing on it. Then, thank God, I saw you again just as you were leaving."

He finished the gin and ginger ale and lit a cigarette, holding out a crumpled packet of them to Stephanie.

"Half of the money is yours," he said, looking at the end of the cigarette.

She gasped and wondered what he meant.

"You must really be crazy. How on earth could any of it belong to me? Why, I hadn't anything to do with it at all. Of course, it's *damn* decent of you to pretend I did—look here, do you know who I am and is it just your way of trying to help me without hurting my feelings?"

He shook his head.

"Haven't the faintest idea who you are. Don't the tickets prove that I've really made the money as I told you?"

She fingered them.

"Ye-es, I suppose so. *Good Lord*, you don't realize what an awful temptation it is, but of course I can't. I mean I won't. Every cent of it belongs to you and no one else has the faintest claim. I just happened to give you the hunch—it might have been any of a thousand others."

She turned a face torn with conflicting emotion. She wanted the money so much, so very much. He seemed a heavenly rescuer who had appeared just as she was wilting to the dust. On the other hand, no decent person could take advantage of his impulsive, half-cracked notion that half of the money belonged to her. He would probably regret it himself as soon as he returned to normal. Racing fever is a strange thing, she thought.

"I don't know why you should worry about me," she said, "a derelict rail-bird,—"

"You are not," he contradicted positively. "It's as if I'd known you for ages. Who are you, I wonder."

"The impulse to tell a complete stranger one's life story—but it would be rather hard on the stranger."

His gray eyes seemed to reflect

sympathetically her fantastic air of trouble.

"Please go ahead," he said.

She twisted a handkerchief in her long fingers and traced designs in the air with the tip of her suede slipper.

"Not very original, I'm afraid," Stephanie began. "Rich but honest parents, soon becoming poor and dishonest through 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.' What a lot fortune gets blamed for—backing the wrong horses, the wrong stocks, the wrong daughter. They thought I'd pay dividends on everything they'd spent on me—instead, I disgraced the poor things. I must say it was fun for a while just after we were married. You know—dancing, drinking, racing. Oh, there's nothing like it at its best. And this was the best butter all right. But, of course, I was a good deal of a fool and flirted just a little too much. Franklin did too, but it's different when the husband plays around. Everyone expects that somehow. Unfortunately, he happened to pick on something I hadn't done and you know how, even if you've lots of other crimes on your record, you become injured innocence if someone takes you up on the one thing you've held off from.

"Franklin got back to the house near Towson one night and saw a young man jump out of one of the back windows and drive off in a gray Mercer—Mercers were very *chic* then. It just happened that a friend of his had come back to Baltimore after a year or two and had walked calmly into the house not knowing me at all but sure that he'd find either both of us or neither. He saw me through the glass doors of the dining room sitting alone in the drawing room, and having walked in the front door without ringing I suppose he felt a bit shy."

She stopped and pulled at the cigarette.

"It's a pity he should have felt shy at that particular time, because nothing would convince Franklin of the fact that I hadn't even known the boy was there.

"I don't have to be told to get out

twice and I left Baltimore that night. Unfortunately, not alone. That's why when Franklin wrote and said he had found out what had happened from this youth and begged me to come back, I couldn't. You see I had this other man on my hands. He was a kind soul but I disliked him after a couple of weeks much more than I ever had Frank. Besides, we had to hang around odd corners of Europe till the divorce went through and after it did, I wouldn't come home. My mother had died, and Papa, as usual very hard-up, had remarried a florid widow, extremely rich, I believe, who stipulated that my name should never be mentioned.

"Also, I think, no one ever comes back unless they are in love with the man and proud to show him off. I wasn't at all. However, I nursed the poor lamb at Davos for two years. He died of tuberculosis last summer.

"As for me," she shrugged, "I'm as strong as an ox, though the effect is so fragile. But I admit that's because I haven't done much heavy eating lately. I'm not sure what to pawn next." She stopped for a moment and then said slowly:

"It's a pity for me that the young man was so shy."

The man opposite flushed. He stared at her unselfconscious and troubled face and hardly knew how to interrupt with any comment.

Finally he murmured as if with some difficulty:

"I have a colt I'd like to have you name. I think we might call it '*Amende Honorable*.'"

She looked up.

"What did you say?"

"Sometimes," he started stumbling over the words, "sometimes, if you've lost twice in succession, the third bet'll bring you luck. I'm rather an outsider, I know, but perhaps—"

Stephanie interrupted, looking startled. "I swear I don't understand what you're driving at."

"You mean that you are—" but he finished the sentence for her—

"The Shy Young Man."

Stephanie passed one thin hand across her forehead.

He stood up smiling diffidently.

"A twenty-to-one shot," he said. "My past performances aren't too good but perhaps you'll take the chance, Slim Lady."

II

THE AFTERNOON drifted gently to dusk. Blue shadows, faint mists and the smell of burning leaves melted in the opalescent light. A band with the time and rhythm of village fair "band concerts" beat heavily out a tune that everyone hummed and whistled as they left the stands:

"My sweetie went away, but she *didn't* say *where*,
She *didn't* say why,
She *didn't* say how she went."

Stephanie and Randy Carroll had left a little ahead of the end to escape the

rush of people. They walked silently over the worn turf, through thousands of parked cars, along by day coaches standing ready to take the crowds back to Baltimore and Washington.

"If you hadn't discovered me," she said, pointing to the trains, "that would have been my fate." She smiled but shuddered slightly. "Grit, oranges, melting milk chocolate, men in striped shirts and derbies pushed back from hot foreheads—horrible!"

"We," said Randy, smiling shyly at her, "are going to see a lot of each other."

A ragged little colored boy sold them a paper packet of roast chestnuts, others pushed racing circulars into their hands.

Randy stopped at a shining wonder of a car in grey and silver.

"Still grey but no longer a Mercer," he murmured. "I hope you'll have reason to be fonder of this one."



Prophecy

By William Troy

WHEN you are a little older
And the swift black head is gray,
Walking alone in your garden,
Someone will say:

"There goes one who boasted
Lover for every day;
Fairer than Helen or Iseult,
Yet she drove love away."

And lifting your eyes with wonder
Shall you laugh or fret?
Or shall your heart turn quiet
With a still regret?



In spite of a grim warning, the detective traces the malevolent Artifex through the mazes of a new crime.



This is the third of Smart Set's

Craig Kennedy Series



The Radio Riddle

By Arthur B. Reeve

"I AM broadcasting this warning to Professor Craig Kennedy. Any one who picks it up will please deliver it to him at the University."

Kennedy was at work on his new radio compass, a direction finder capable of being operated by one person alone, a device which by an entirely original principle enabled one to determine not only the direction but also to approximate the distance of a hidden sending station. I had been toying with a new super-regenerative set, catching stray messages on various wave lengths.

"Listen in, Craig!" I exclaimed. "This is some crime—covered up!"

Kennedy adjusted the two-stage amplifier just as the strange message was repeated.

"Some crime—perhaps—but uncovered, not covered up. Wait."

From the loud speaker came the words: "You may be called in on a case. Don't take it. It will be the last you ever attempt. This is Artifex!"

AS IT was repeated, Craig quickly turned to his radio compass and began tinkering and turning the loop microscopically. "That is from just

about two points east of northeast—and the distance is about sixteen kilometers—to be exact, 15,500 meters—about nine miles and a half." He gave a hasty glance at the map. "Somewhere in the vicinity of Pelham."

I glanced over at Kennedy. He was scowling, jaws set like a bulldog. I was silent. I had seen that master of crime at work. Defiance of Artifex was like accepting an invitation to a party at zero hour.

Almost I jumped out of my chair at a gentle, hesitating knocking at the door.

"Artifex isn't calling—yet," Craig smiled grimly. "Please see who it is, Walter."

Nevertheless I opened the door cautiously. It was a girl, a girl with blue eyes of candor that were so beautiful I didn't for a moment see or care what the rest of her face was like.

Her eyes fell on the radio paraphernalia as if it were familiar to her. I thought she drew away from it, too, as if it struck in her an involuntary repugnance. She glanced inquiringly from one to the other of us. Kennedy stepped forward.

Stephanie passed one thin hand across her forehead.

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"Are you . . . Professor Kennedy?"

Craig bowed, at the same time keenly observing his now not unexpected visitor.

The nod seemed to satisfy her. But it also seemed to frighten her. Her eyes roved about the room as if seeking a place where some invisible enemy might lurk. She swallowed hard several times as if she were trying to talk but couldn't.

It was not the gaucherie of a person unused to meeting strangers. It was a fear too deep even for speech. Kennedy smiled at her again to help her collect her thoughts.

When a girl possesses besides such eyes a mouth of sweetness and firmness, the coloring of glorious health all set in a frame of dark curls, I confess my observation is more that of an artist than of one of Kennedy's scientists.

"I am Norma Gerard . . ." she began. ". . . You must have read in the morning papers of the strange death of little Laurel Millan, the secretary to my mother, the Marquise Verna Callahan Gerard?" The very sound of her own words seemed to frighten her. "Mr. Kennedy, I'm afraid for my life . . . and my mother's life. Will you help me? . . . I cannot give you anything very definite . . . but since Laurel's death I feel a sense of impending danger. . . . I don't know which way to turn. People I thought were my friends . . . like Fernie Lefevre . . . I am afraid to trust. I have no one to whom I can go . . . but you, Professor Kennedy . . . a stranger."

Nervously opening and shutting her exquisitely beaded bag, she hesitated, then glancing down at a beaded Buddha in the bag, she stiffened her shoulders, smiled wanly and continued.

"My mother . . . she is my adopted mother . . . of course you know that . . . the Marquise, well, you know she has always surrounded herself with bizarre people, for years. . . . It has made her socially prominent. . . . Just now it is this Hindu Pundit, Durga Nath, and a Russian engineer, Nikolai Strepoff, the inventor of the Strepoff

wireless system. By it the Pundit is receiving messages from the spirit world to the Marquise. Then, too, he claims to be able to read the thoughts of people by a sort of radio telepathy. He has even received what he calls wireless spirit writing over the Strepoff wireless telautograph."

"H'm," reverted Kennedy. "I had read a short item about the strange circumstances of the death of Laurel Millan." His tone was reassuring. "Where is she?"

"The body is at a funeral parlor on Eighth Avenue." Norma shuddered as she said it and nervously raised a white and blue veined hand to smooth back her straying curls. "Oh! I am so dreadfully frightened about it all! . . . My mother is interested in this Oriental religion—and the rites—as they are interpreted by some of the people she almost worships—fill me with fear—and, oh, I hate them! They are so different from anything I like! Mr. Kennedy, no one can hear me—are you sure?"

She glanced about at the wireless apparatus as if half expecting some esoteric radio dictagraph. "I am afraid they know more about Laurel Millan's death than is right. I feel sure Laurel knew something . . . and they killed her. Mr. Kennedy, shall I have to die, too, because I can't be fooled by them all? I don't want to die!" she cried excitedly. "And I don't want anything to happen to my poor deluded mother. Save her . . . and save me!"

Norma burst into sobs that relieved her overwrought nerves. "Mr. Kennedy . . . I may not seem very brave to you . . . but I am not foolish. I know there is real danger to us . . . to you, if you help me. I must be fair." She was pleading. "I would like to take you out there to my mother's estate . . . but . . ."

Kennedy interrupted, reassuring, "No, no, Miss Gerard. You had better go now. We'll get out there . . . some other way . . . safer for you. We don't know you . . . you understand?" He nodded significantly.

"Then . . . you will help me!" She

smiled gratefully through frightened tears as Kennedy pressed her hand at the door.

II

"DOESN'T that coincidence beat all?" I remarked the moment Norma Gerard was gone.

"Not a coincidence. Don't you see? The moment anything quite extraordinary occurs the first thing they think of is to come to us. It's a coincidence to that extent, I grant. But when a case begins to break, things happen fast, and of course the lines cross. That's the experience of all crime hunters."

I was thinking of Artifex. "Craig, that was awful . . . to let that girl go alone. Think what that threat means—to her!"

"Yes, but it was made to us. I did that purposely. If there is any danger—yet, it is to us."

"Will you take it up?"

"Against Artifex? If it's the last thing I ever do!"

IT was about noon when Kennedy and I walked down Eighth Avenue toward the funeral chapel.

Two girls in the costumes of Geisha girls, on either side of the street, were toddling uptown slowly. About their necks were slung light wicker baskets and from the baskets they were distributing little glass flaconettes of some perfume of the orient, little advertising samples.

A girl with a Pekingese just ahead of us took one of the little glass bottles, opened it and poured it on her handkerchief.

As she did so the strong perfume of the sample was very pleasing. I caught her eye and she smiled, just as the Geisha girl on our side of the street handed a sample to Kennedy and another to me, then continued distributing them to passersby behind us.

I started to draw the cork when Kennedy suddenly seized the little glass tube from my hand. Quickly he crushed it in his own handkerchief, then leaned

down and, averting his face slightly, held it under the nose of the Peke. To my astonishment the little dog rolled over almost instantly, gasping.

I turned to look toward the Geisha girls. Both had disappeared in taxicabs, lost in the traffic.

"Cyanogen—for one thing," muttered Kennedy, straightening and dropping his own flaconette in his pocket. "If the Peke doesn't recover, I'll be glad to pay—"

This girl was also gone!

As for myself, I was almost afraid to breathe. It seemed to me that Artifex was literally in the air. But to Kennedy it was like a challenge. . . .

A few minutes later, within the funeral parlor, we were conducted to a sort of private morgue or reception room.

As we entered I noticed, just outside, across some palms, a very distinguished looking foreigner. Everything aroused my suspicion now. I caught Kennedy's sleeve. "Craig . . . see that fellow over there?"

He turned. But the man was gone!

It is heartbreaking to look on youth struck down mysteriously, coldly, cruelly.

Gently Kennedy raised the eyelids of Laurel Millan. . . . I shivered. That poor frail little body lying there so still had the whole secret locked in those horror-struck eyes!

They had left the body dressed as she was found in her apartment. Her beautiful hair had tumbled down and was hanging in long curls about her face and shoulders. The white of the death pallor and of the gown she wore only enhanced her ethereal loveliness and blonde beauty.

"Those eyes!" repeated Kennedy. "What did she see?"

"Poor little thing!" I exclaimed. "She seems like something to be petted and humored—not to be murdered!"

"Yes, Walter, but there is determination in that face . . . personality, persistence . . . too much, probably, for Artifex!"

KENNEDY softly closed his eyes, unconsciously betraying the tenderness of a strong mind. It seemed as if he were trying to save Laurel the misery of looking again at something awful.

A moment later his more minute observation disclosed a mark, an almost invisible puncture on her breast, two or three inches above the heart. He continued his investigation, fortunately in time before the embalming. As he did so I walked a few paces away.

Beside me I heard a voice of recognition and inquiry and turned to meet Lawrence Kerry, the lawyer, nephew of the old Marquise. I knew Kerry was attorney for the Callahan transcontinental railroad interests, having interviewed him, and that his own holdings and his Aunt's, combined, would have meant control of the system.

Kerry seemed greatly worried over the scandal as I talked with him. But there was evidently a deeper worry back of it. I felt that Kerry himself scented something sinister in the death of little Laurel Millan. What was it?

"I've been anxious about the Callahan properties," Kerry confided a moment later when I introduced him to Craig, "and I've been cultivating the acquaintance of Laurel. . . . I've been trying to influence her to tell me the truth. . . . And I think she was about to tell . . . when . . . she died."

The uncanny events had aroused in me the wildest suspicions—suspicion now of even Kerry himself. Had he been trying to put over something? I had heard of the pretty adopted daughter, Norma Gerard, even before her visit, and also of Fernie Lefevre, her companion. And I had heard of the vagaries of the Marquise.

"Just now, I suppose you know," wandered Kerry thoughtfully, "the Marquise has taken up Hindu thought in a serious way. Oriental religions give Mrs. Gerard a new thrill; I don't think she ever got a kick out of our own. And this new fad has the added piquancy of a sort of scientific mysticism, so to speak. . . . This Pundit,

Durga Nath, has been poisoning Norma's mind against me . . . hinting at my friendship for Laurel . . . and others. . . . I would have married Norma and reunited the great Callahan railroad interests . . . but Norma has politely thrown me over."

I wondered. Had little Laurel Millan known the truth—who Artifex was?

"It all means a great deal more than the death of poor little Laurel, I'm afraid," remarked Kennedy. "Where is the Pundit?"

"Up at Rye."

I thought of the warning broadcast from Pelham a few miles away.

"I would like to see him."

Kerry brightened. "Kennedy," he exclaimed, "won't you come out there—as my friend?"

III

I SMOTHERED my fear of further attack as we drove out, and in point of fact nothing happened.

As we approached the great Callahan estate at Rye, a show place of some ten or twelve acres on a point of land jutting out into the Sound, Kerry informed us that it had been renamed "Nirvana."

East is not Westchester, but the twain seemed to have met in the Marquise Gerard's "Temple of the Occult," as she liked to call her place at "Nirvana." I saw wind wheels and water wheels, each with a prayer, silk flags flapping in the breeze, each with the same prayer, OM MANI PADME HUM. All the wheels were turning and the flags fluttering. On a rock were cut in the same words, "The jewel is in the lotos."

The house itself was magnificent, after the manner of a huge French chateau. Kerry conducted us directly to a wide Hindu drawing-room, with carved columns and a beautiful mosaic floor.

The beauty of this room was architectural. There was a rich simplicity of draperies and furnishings. There were hand-wrought metal sconces and beautifully made swinging lamps and

incense burners. At the far end was a raised and beautifully carved teakwood dais on which to worship.

The oriental spirit crept upon one unawares. A wonderfully carved ivory statue of Buddha was irresistible; Buddha with the inscrutable eyes. Even I felt an impulse to bend the knee on the dais. It seemed in that subdued light that if I did not show the proper respect those arms might unfold and crush me.

Pillows of silks and gauzes from the orient, rare embroideries on the divan, pipes and stands, carved ivories and ornaments of jade spread over all this luxury of simplicity the glamor of the East.

Not far from the statue there was a group of three. "My aunt, the Pundit and his servant, Singh," whispered Kerry. "I'll present you, Kennedy, as Mr. Harrington of the Psychical Research Society."

The Marquise Verna Gerard had inherited the greater part of the railroad interests of her father, the pioneer trans-continental promoter, Aloysius Callahan. She was now a rather stout lady of late middle age with an inability to forget her early days in San Francisco and Paris.

"Mr. Harrington, Aunt Verna."

I fancied a half cynical smile on the face of the Pundit. I felt convinced that he had recognized Kennedy instantly.

To me Verna Gerard looked like a woman who was fond of slipping toward the easy things of life. She was trying to slide into heaven on a road greased with an easy-going oriental religion. And the Pundit, I wagered, was not greasing the road for love of the Marquise or of a heavenly reward.

"I am so glad you have come," smiling goodnaturedly to us and offering us a fat, pudgy hand—"that is, if you come to us in the spirit willing to be convinced, not antagonistic."

Kennedy made a most impressive bow and assumed a deep seriousness as we listened to the Marquise.

The Pundit was before a huge draw-

ing—the Wheel of Life—with all its hells and heavens. Just behind him cringed Singh, his "chela," a half-caste.

"The Pundit, Durga Nath—and his pupil, Singh," pursued Kerry.

I caught the hypnotic eyes of the Pundit; sleek, slim, dark, oily, the Pundit from a land where shadow is substance and substance is shadow.

"I am always delighted to meet those who seek to learn the way, Mr. Curry," he smoothed. Still, the Pundit pronounced Kerry's name with an accent as if he would gladly have eaten him.

"We hope to get another message, Mr. Harrington, from my poor little secretary, Miss Millan," injected the Marquise. "You may have read of Laurel's cruel death. I feel terribly over it and I have begged the Pundit to try to find from Laurel some clue to lead us to her slayer, if there was one."

"The Marquise is right," pursued the Pundit evenly. "If there are no disturbing or distracting elements the dead girl may be strong enough to get over a message of enough significance to avenge her." At this very unBuddhist sentiment the Pundit leveled his eyes in a searching glance toward Kennedy and from him to Kerry. I could not help wondering if the Pundit knew more about the relations of Laurel Millan and Kerry than Kerry would care for us to know.

"Be careful, Aunt Verna," spoke that gentleman, "how you try to get evidence. I would rather depend on our own police than follow evidence that may be even celestial."

The Pundit glowered, turned his back on Kerry and was soon engaged in a conversation that engrossed the entire attention of the Marquise.

A SECOND group I had seen, apart. Among them I recognized Norma Gerard. With a start I saw the man I had seen at the funeral parlor. I knew him instantly. He must be Nikolai Strepoff, the handsome young Russian engineer.

Scraps of their conversation told me that it was about a lawn party to dedi-

cate to society a new Temple of the Occult and was not to be delayed by the death of little Laurel Millan.

I guessed that the third in this group was slender Fernie Lefevre, the social butterfly in the bizarre circle of the Marquise Verna. At a distance she seemed very Parisian. We followed Kerry.

Fernie Lefevre's beauty literally smote me. It was artificial but overwhelming. Titian hair made a halo around a face of startling beauty. Small features delicately moulded, small, daintily shaped limbs showing through a gown that would have done creditable duty in India's climate, eyes enticing, entreating, seductive, she was passion personified.

Fernie must have her own divan. Violet and orchid and mauve shades enhanced her startling beauty. When we entered she was stretched out full length on the violet pillows with all the lithe beauty of a tigress. One leg was thrown over the other in an indolent, alert pose. As I was introduced she straightened out, raised her hand compelling me to bend over her and through half-closed eyes gave me a dreamy smile that made me startle awkwardly. The air was redolent with her favorite perfume.

"Miss Lefevre—Mr. Harrington," hastened Kerry.

Fernie opened her eyes wider and sought to hold Craig by their suggestive appeal. She forgot, too, to let his hand go, animatedly discussing the lawn fête. Kennedy must have felt the warmth of her little hand and its unnecessary pressure.

With an amused smile he turned as Kerry presented him to Norma. Disengaging his hand he bowed. The suppression of a flash of recognition brought a flush to Norma's face. She was beautiful, becomingly gowned in a yellow dress. It seemed as if each were intensifying the striking contrast in their two beauties.

Norma consciously reacted at the covert huntress in Fernie and Fernie rather enjoyed the conflict. Bantering

with Kerry she seemed to exaggerate the causes of Norma's reaction. Fernie knew how to shoot and her arrows reached their mark.

At once I caught the fact that Fernie would have liked to vamp Kerry. Also, introduced to Strepoff attentively near Norma, I saw that the striking young Russian engineer was seeking to monopolize Norma's heart. To me, while I sensed the conflict of the women, I saw the conflict of the men.

A MOMENT and Strepoff was again in the interrupted conversation about costuming for the lawn fête. From a remark of Norma's I gathered that the elaborately correct costumes had been obtained from the little oriental curio shop of Kashi on Madison Avenue, and Strepoff's manner rather than his words seemed to imply that no one could be correctly costumed elsewhere.

The Marquise and the Pundit were not long in joining us, and with the ardor of a propagandist the Marquise raced from the current matter of costumes to inviting us to be guests at the fête. With a proper degree of hesitation Kennedy accepted the coveted offer.

It was Kerry's legal instinct that led the conversation around again to the matter of the poor little Millan girl, the subject uppermost in all minds, and Kennedy in his psychic rôle was not slow to take advantage of it.

"The Marquise said a moment ago that you expected another message from Miss Millan in the spirit plane," remarked Kennedy, looking questioningly from her to the Pundit. "Do I understand by that that you have established communication with her already? It is a matter on which I would be eager to report to the society."

Durga Nath could hardly avoid the inquiry nor did he seem to desire to do so. "Already," he replied, "we have had messages from the borderland from Miss Millan, using Monsieur's Hertzian waves, messages a little confused, as of a mind from a lower plane

suddenly transported to a higher and striving to orientate itself."

"Then is it your belief that Miss Millan had progressed upward in the cycle during her life in this plane?"

"I cannot say, yet. It may be that she has shaken the shackles of evil from this our lower plane. Karma is a cyclic occurrence; good or evil of a life affect the next existence. Evil, as Gautama taught, is to gratify the senses, the desire for personal immortality, the desire for prosperity."

The Pundit was evasive to the point of hypocrisy, I felt. How deep were those beautiful thoughts?

"One must walk the Aryan Path, the Eight-fold Way—right views, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right rapture. Only when the first personal pronoun has vanished from one's private thoughts comes Nirvana, serenity of soul, not extinction, but extinction of selfish desire. 'Who-soever would save his life, shall lose it.'"

As the Marquise aided by Singh fell into an exposition of the philosophy I was suddenly awakened to the fact that back of it all were the Pundit and his Non-Cooperation Society, a fanatical worship of Mahatma Gandhi, a subtle Hindu propaganda in America.

It was really due to Kerry's legal questioning that the talk was carried about on that tack. "Then," remarked Kerry after another dictum of the Pundit, "all Doing is Evil?"

"To abstain from action is well, Mr. Curry," retorted the Pundit, still shading Kerry's name, "except to acquire merit!"

Kerry said nothing. He turned as a prosecutor will when he has led a witness into a morass. I saw, but was at a loss to interpret yet, the ill-concealed animosity between the Pundit and Strepoff on one side and Kerry on the other. Under cover of these unctuous thoughts did the Pundit seek to marry the Marquise? Was he equally concerned in alienating Norma from Kerry?

My speculations were interrupted by the little butterfly vamp, Fernie. She moved lithely in her sheer garments toward Kerry.

"You are going as a rajah tonight, Larry—and I shall be a nautch girl," she thrilled. "Remember the story of the Rajah of Rajput and the nautch girl and the love flowers she wore?"

Fernie executed a swaying step close to him and drew taut over her head a long mauve scarf that had been about her shoulders, the ends waving gracefully. A most seductive, erotic perfume surrounded her like a cloud. Fernie knew that she was the essence of love.

"In some past life, who knows," she paraphrased, "but you were a king in a Hindu court and I was your Christian slave?"

I watched Kerry closely to catch any sign of a struggle in himself.

"I'm afraid, Fernie," he remarked coldly and deliberately, "afraid of the first rule of the Pundit's evil—to gratify the senses—and the last step in that Aryan Path—right rapture!"

Kennedy contrived a diplomatic departure, and as we came out of earshot remarked in an undertone, "After that from Kerry—watch Fernie!"

IV

AN HOUR later, back in the city again, Kennedy's first concern seemed to be to secure correct costumes so that we would not be marked guests at the rather exclusive lawn fête to which we had been invited. We sought out the wonder shop of Kashi near the Grand Central on Madison Avenue.

Kashi himself was a little wizened Jap, and in his shop was displayed the most marvelous Oriental collection in the city, everything, even the most recondite, masks of the devil dance, prayer wheels, priceless jades and ambers, yellow ivories from Japan, the most valuable and matchless Buddhas.

Kashi was invaluable in picking out costumes. Kennedy seemed to know what he wanted, however—the dress of

a fakir with a monkey. I accepted Kashi's suggestion of accompanying him as a mendicant with a begging bowl.

IN the back of the shop we encountered a visitor, a short physically powerful dark man of decided Tartar cast of features. The place was so small and intimate that the excessively polite Kashi could not well avoid introducing us.

"This is Mr. Leonid Malinsky," he purred, "a close friend of Mr. Strepoff—Strepoff of Moscow—organizer of the new universal internationale of Labor in all lands."

Malinsky of the Third Internationale was a quiet little man with a smile that was as a shield to the real self underneath. He seemed absolutely at home in Kashi's shop, and from his manner and some literature on a table beside him, I gathered that he was seeking to enlist Kashi as a Japanese socialist.

There was no concealment about Malinsky, and yet there was an air more baffling than about the Pundit, Strepoff or even Kashi. Kennedy made several ineffectual attempts to lead the conversation into channels of sovietism and again into non-cooperationism, but in each case Malinsky betrayed nothing more than a scholarly reticence. My impression was that he might have said much if he would.

"Many of you Americans, many of the newspaper writers," he volunteered at last changing the subject at a mention of the Marquise Gerard, "make all sorts of fun of Durga Nath and the Marquise. They forget that at least the Pundit and his disciple have a religion that is Eurasian—more closely Aryan than the religion of Babylon and the Semites which the critics profess."

I followed him keenly. His was the incisive, iconoclastic reasoning of many remarkable Bolshevik brains. "Strange . . . the one great Aryan religion is almost confined to Mongolians! Aryans themselves are under the Semitic religions of Judea and Babylonia. . . . Christendom as well as Islam. Curiously, both Christianity and Buddhism

have the ritual and formulæ tinged by Hamitic Egypt."

It was like mental setting-up exercises to talk with this man, even though one went through only what exercises he chose. Our costumes were ready too soon.

"Craig," I exclaimed as we left the shop, "Durga Nath is without a doubt in America to raise money for the Hindu peaceful revolution. Is he, with real oriental guile, using Russian Bolshevism to further his purpose? Or is Strepoff engineering a union of Bolshevik Russia with the Hindu revolution?"

"I have been studying Strepoff," evaded Kennedy sententiously. "Strepoff is what I would call a type, a psychopathic sensualist, a varietist among women, a dealer in hearts, a man of a multitude of loves, unless I am mistaken. In other words, Walter, just now I'm more interested in personalities than in politics. Every time I think of him I think of Heine's lines, 'Love's madness? Love is itself a madness!'"

"And the Pundit," I pursued, "is he a Hindu Pecksniff?"

"We are east of Suez—where the best is like the worst."

LATER, in the laboratory, where we had gone to dress for the fête, Kennedy imparted an astounding discovery after a short time of intensive study at his microscope and precipitins.

"You see, Walter, I drew off just a bit of fluid from above her breast. . . . The little secretary died of snake venom—the poison of Naja—the cobra."

"But the snake bite shows twin punctures of the fangs. There was only one that I saw."

"Did you ever think of a hypodermic—and synthetic snake venom?"

I considered for a moment with whom we had to deal—Artifex.

V

AS HE prepared for the lawn fête Craig was very careful. He spent a great deal of time adjusting the turban

of his outfit. In fact, he seemed very particular about it.

The monkey, a very intelligent little fellow, was clad in an old-fashioned soldier suit, with a knapsack. This also Kennedy was very careful about, as well as the cord attached to a little harness about the simian waist and shoulders.

We set out at last and Kennedy stowed away his wireless compass in the back of the car.

It was just becoming dark when we arrived at Nirvana. A part of the lawn bordering a grove had been made into a huge open-air tea garden. Under the twinkling lights over the lawn and

showed that this masquerading was disgusting to a practical, normal business attorney, who was more interested in the market, stocks and timely bonds than in maharanees, sandals and tinkling bells.

"Oh, Lord!" I heard him shuffle his feet and stretch. "If it wasn't for all this bally rot of India, I might have a chance to fix things up with her." Then he stood up, surveying his legs and embroidered satin coat scornfully. "Why do nutty people always want to make everybody around them nutty, too?"

"Having a good time talking to yourself?" There was a wicked little laugh from Fernie as she suddenly pos-

Relentlessly, doggedly, CRAIG KENNEDY—who long since took his assured place among the great detectives of romance—pursues the malevolent Shadow that has set its goal at no less an object than the sheer destruction of society. The mark of ARTIFEX, most sinister and cunning of criminals, is seen, now here, now there—remorselessly at his foul task of tearing down the structure of civilization. . . . His methods are fabulous—or would seem so in any age but this, with its "Death Rays" and poison gas and strange development of mysterious psychic powers.

In the September SMART SET, the track of Artifex's malice leads to the most despicable of all crimes—kidnapping. This will be the Fourth of SMART SET'S Craig Kennedy series. Don't miss "The Toxin of Hate."

winking among the trees was a brilliant gathering.

Everywhere were nautch girls. The Marquise herself was gorgeously attired as a maharanee. Norma made a ravishing native princess. Fernie was in her element as leader of the nautch dancers. Strepoff I saw as an ancient priest or lama. But the social lion of the occasion was the Pundit.

Eyes roving about, I saw that we were within a few feet of Kerry in the shadow. Kerry had come as a rajah, rather nervous and a bit sour. He was seated upon a queer-looking boulder in a lonesome corner of the tea garden. As a rajah he was not a success. He

tured out of a clump of shrubbery with a swirl of white draperies that would have caused an anchorite to follow such a will-o'-the-wisp. "Well . . . I suppose it's an offense if even a naughty little nautch girl flits between you and the . . . the princess . . . now that Laurel doesn't bother you. . . . Ta! ta!"

She was gone before he could frame a reply. Kennedy had been right.

Craig filtered through the throng after her. At last we came upon the Marquise, the Pundit and Strepoff under a cluster of lights. In her hand the Marquise was holding a sheet of paper on which was a peculiar scrawl in large flowing letters.

"Mr. Harrington," she received us, "this is some of the automatic writing over the Strepoff wireless telautograph. It is a message from Laurel Millan in spirit land."

Kennedy bent over and puzzled out the sweeping scrawl: "One sworn to uphold the Law removed me from his path."

It was ambiguous, cryptic.

"You are convinced of the ability of mind, of spirit to affect a radio set, if sufficiently delicate?" asked Kennedy.

"Prepared according to my discovery," defended Strepoff. "For instance, Dr. Crile's numberless experiments prove conclusively that the life force—what Bergson calls the vital urge, the *élan vital*—the thing which is found in living organisms and is not found in dead organisms—produces the various activities known as life and is merely an electric current. The brain is simply a complicated generator of electric current, an agglomeration of tiny electric batteries, the brain cells, very much like the ordinary wet batteries that furnish current to ring doorbells. That is the only function of these cells. The human body is composed of twenty-six trillion cells!"

He seized a pencil and wrote: 26,000,000,000,000,000,000. "Brain and spinal cord alone contain upward of two billion cells." Again he made the figures, 2,000,000,000. "Is it such an impossible thought that in this combination of cells—of matter—of electrons—of force—something survives—and can affect other combinations of electrons?"

Fernie, who had floated across our ken, bent over and also read the writing. "Laurel was familiar with your stocks and bonds?"

The Marquise nodded.

"Who, then, might have sought information—might have sought to get control of the Callahan railroad interests?"

"Little Laurel was a faithful secretary."

"I think Norma in her car—once saw her over in Pelham with someone."

There was a feline purr in the words and I knew they referred to some tiff Norma had had with Kerry over the matter of his acquaintance with Laurel. "Sworn to uphold the Law . . . from his Path." She purred the words over.

I saw the serpent's tongue, the veiled accusation of Kerry. Was it Fernie's revenge—because Kerry had been cold and deliberate at her advances? But, I paused, what on the other hand did I know? Might there not be some truth in it, after all? Norma's own face was a study, though she kept silent. The open face of the Marquise displayed a rather violent antagonism toward Kerry.

"It may be—it will be—if it is true," smoothed the Pundit sanctimoniously, "that we shall get more of it over the spirit wireless tonight when we dedicate the Temple."

"Yes . . . why was he in Pelham . . . with Laurel? You saw them. What were they there for?"

Norma hesitated, then flared. "That is unfair, mother. Laurel is dead—and you don't even let Larry speak in his own defense."

The Marquise seemed more intolerantly angry than ever. "I don't see why you should rise to his defense," she snapped. "Didn't you get angry enough at Larry for neglecting you?"

Fernie gave a spiteful laugh of satisfaction at what she had started, then, blowing a feline kiss to Norma, danced away.

IT WAS time for the nautch dance. Kerry had been watching his opportunity on the outskirts of the crowd babbling of their society and of the new religion. He started to make his way toward Norma. But other vigilant eyes were open. The Pundit carried off the prize. With the Marquise and the Pundit Norma was borne over toward a nook where were some empty seats. Even before they arrived Strepoff appeared and bowed low over Norma's hand. Kerry bit his lip. He was effectually stymied.

It was not long before the romantic Strepoff succeeded in detaching Norma and himself from the others. As for the Marquise, she was never far from the lion. Almost she fawned on him. "The most romantic and charming of philosophers," she had often called him.

Strepoff led Norma up a rose-entwined pergola. Norma was animated, but, knowing what I did of her, I felt sure that she was trying to have a good time the hardest she had ever tried and without much success. I could imagine her, as she caught sight of Kerry's doleful face far off, saying to herself, "Something's wrong with everybody!"

I had eyes for nothing but the nautch dance in its sinuous posturing sensuousness, when I felt Kennedy plucking at my sleeve. I tore myself away from the enticing living moving picture.

The tea garden and the grove with their alternating deep shadows and sparkling lights were ideal for just what Kennedy purposed. From where we stood in a carefully selected shadow we could see the Pundit and the Eurasian, Singh.

"A little mysterious but not mystical plotting," whispered Craig.

I thought the Pundit now a little too intimate and animated for the placid demeanor exhibited in the public eye.

VI

A MOMENT later, as a group of guests interrupted them, the two drew back from the tea garden. We followed, and it was soon evident that they were headed for the new Temple of the Occult, a rather pretentious stone edifice which the Marquise had caused to be built at some expense. It was to be dedicated after the dance.

Before the door swung shut on them, I caught a glimpse of a great Buddha inside, a bronze figure more than life-size squatting on a dais before which in the dim light incense burned.

Kennedy surveyed the temple appraisingly. Before us was a sheer wall. But high overhead at one end, to pro-

duce a light effect from the rising sun on the statue, were some little windows. Kennedy patted the monkey—and pointed overhead. Obediently the intelligent little beast climbed at the end of his twisted rope.

As he climbed, I could see Kennedy was very busy with his turban. I could not see very distinctly in the shadows, but it seemed as if he drew down over his ears what might be the headpiece of a telephone operator. Then he attached the twisted rope to the turban.

The monkey climbed and perched silently in the window. Kennedy beckoned me closer and loosened one of the discs so that it rested on my ear while the other rested on his own.

"How can a man follow the Way or play the game when he is eternally pursued by women?" came a far-off voice.

This must have been from Singh. I did not stop to ask questions, but merely listened. The Pundit was speaking.

"Once I am married to the Marquise . . . that shall cease!"

There was a moment's silence.

"In that monkey's knapsack," whispered Kennedy, "is the transmitter of a dictagraph. I wanted a turban to hide the receiver."

As we listened in on the conversation of the Pundit and Singh, I fancied I began to get what was under the surface.

It was one final effort to fasten the murder of little Laurel Millan on Kerry!

More astounding, as Singh told it, I gathered that dope parties had been a part of the cult; that Fernie had been in some of them; that Norma had refused to be drawn in. It seemed that the night before Laurel had been inveigled into one.

"I shudder at the thought of little Laurel in the clutches of Singh!" I muttered.

"Sh!" from Craig.

Singh was talking. She had seemed to be under the influence of the opium. But she was not. She had been playing a game. She had overheard something.

"And so!" exclaimed Craig. "She was removed by a needle and cobra venom!"

But by whom?

ALONE though they thought themselves, the Pundit and his chela were still careful. Neither incriminated the other, nor did they cast suspicion on anyone else.

"If Norma doesn't become more reasonable she will have no need of a seance to talk to Laurel," malignantly sneered Singh. "They can enjoy themselves in heaven—together!"

All we had learned was that Laurel Millan, faithful to the interests of the Marquise, had stopped at nothing to learn the truth. Therefore, someone had removed her. Who was it? . . .

We could now hear voices wafted in the night air through the grove. The dance was over and the Marquise was leading her guests to the great event, the dedication of the Temple. Kennedy quickly pulled in the twisted wire which had served in place of a cord to hold his living dictagraph.

All were now approaching the Temple eager to view that mysteriously mystic shrine. Light chatter in smart lingo did not seem, however, to accord with Gautama Buddha.

"And they really expect to get spirit messages from the little Millan girl?"

"Yes . . . even expect to learn who killed her."

"How intriguing!"

It was a curious combination in the Temple of the Occult—Buddha and Western spiritism, the occult and that modern mystery, the wireless.

So eager were all now to unravel the riddle of Laurel's strange death that everything else was secondary.

While Kennedy was engaged outside, I crept in to observe the necromantic actions of the Pundit.

In the semi-darkness I saw fluctuating luminous vapors exuding, as it were, from the Pundit's body. They seemed to condense into some sort of visually substantial form.

"The ectoplasm!" I heard an erudite flapper whisper.

A spirit message had begun to falter from the radio. Quietly and quickly I rejoined Kennedy outside.

He had brought up from his car the delicate little loop that constituted his radio compass. Swiftly, carefully he adjusted it. Then he looked at the distance dial, did a hasty mental calculation.

"Pelham—again!"

"K K K K K K K"

The letter, repeated faintly, over and over, came from the radio set. Kennedy leaped from the shadows where his radio compass had been placed.

"That is a direct accusation of Kerry!"

He strode into the temple, his faker's garments trailing in the wind, his right hand raised, palm outward.

"Stop!"

A gasp swept the tense and credulous audience. Quickly Kennedy raised the monkey so all could see, then opened the knapsack.

"There's nothing occult about this," he remarked impressively, turning the knapsack toward them. "You can all see—it is an ordinary dictagraph—that has caught thousands of criminals!"

Kennedy pointed his hand upward at the little windows about to explain, but the little monkey saved his words. He leaped across the floor and swung up to the windows, sat there chattering and grinning, without even the need of an order. Without a word, Kennedy faced full toward Singh.

"The dictagraph told me more than your spirit wireless will ever tell—of how little Laurel made you think she was stupefied by opium when she was not; how she was struck down for learning what she should not, struck down by a needle and synthetic snake venom, as I found in my own laboratory, struck down at the hands of the master!"

"But . . . Durga Nath . . . is not the master!"

"Then—who?"

There was silence, fear on Singh's

face. Kennedy did not press for an answer, immediately.

"Let me do a little reconstruction of events, of motives. What was to be gained in all of this scheming? Just this: With the lawyer Kerry in the power of Fernie Lefevre, with the Marquise under the spell of the Pundit, with Norma fascinated by Strepoff—why—the railroad interests—of course!"

It was as if a great sunlight arc had flooded the Temple. If there was anything of which the Marquise was jealous in guarding, it was the Callahan stocks.

"The truth is that someone—one who calls himself Artifex—not Lawrence Kerry—wanted this railroad fortune! Kerry is cleared of suspicion. This is only part of a plan of this Artifex!"

A shot startled us, reverberating from the outside through the weirdly acoustic Temple. All was in turmoil. We crowded out.

There, beside Kennedy's radio compass, lay Singh, dead.

HAD it been suicide? Kennedy knelt beside him, searched him. In his pocket he found a little packet of poisoned thorns.

"He had been delegated to kill me! When he failed . . . Artifex . . . or his agent . . . removed him!"

The Marquise was trembling. At last her eyes were opened. "Where's . . . Norma?"

"Gone!"

"And Fernie, too!"

"Then Norma is in danger!" It was Kerry, livid with emotion. "Her beauty—her body—her life!"

Verna Gerard turned to Kennedy, imploring, instinctive. "Norma knew something . . . from Laurel. Like a fool, I brought it up, on that hint from Fernie. Can it be that it is that knowledge that is taking Norma into danger?" I thought of the coincidence of Pelham—of the hidden wireless station. "Find her!" implored the Marquise.

How could we get there? Norma had known something. But the Marquise did not. Nor did we.

"There is just one thing you can do." Kennedy faced her severely. "This Pundit has been exposed. He is not Artifex. Who, then, is? Strepoff? He is gone! Compel this Pundit to continue to receive these spirit messages, as if nothing had happened. Under no circumstances allow him to touch anything that may be part of a sending set. There must be some among you who know wireless since it became a fad. Yes? I call on you to aid the Marquise!"

Kennedy saw instantly that he might count on the temper of this sensation-loving crowd. A moment later he picked up his radio compass.

"Walter—the car. Take the shore road to Pelham. Come on, Kerry. I may need you."

VII

NEVER have I experienced anything more weird than this radio chase in the night, stopping and setting up the direction finder, making a hasty computation, getting a new angle, then down another road; again the set-up and a correction, ever closer.

Could Kennedy save Norma? I felt a sickening fear of something impending—for her.

At last we stopped before a darkened house. We had gone just a few feet past it. Kennedy was setting up his compass.

"I think it is what the last set-up indicated," he muttered. "If it is, this loop will point us—back—to it."

Suddenly, from the darkened house, there rose a burst of flame. The white figure of a woman, running, to the rear, caught my eye. Without waiting I leaped after her. As I looked back I saw Kennedy and Kerry headed toward the blast.

The woman sped like a frightened doe. Draperies flying, I could see her. But I doubt if I could have caught her in her terrified flight had it not been for a thick hedge of buckthorn.

It was Fernie, hysterical, as I crushed all sentiment and gripped her little wrists.

"I found them . . . Nikolai and Norma . . . I set it off . . . the thing Malinsky prepared if it was ever raided. . . . Nikolai . . . a prisoner with her . . . in the burning room full of radio apparatus! Nikolai . . . a game . . . but no more . . . not for all the damned Callahan railroads!"

Crushing her along beside me toward the burning house I came upon Kerry, with Norma, clinging in his arms. Almost Fernie tore herself from my grip. I felt that she would have torn her eyes out.

"No . . . you were the real victim, Larry." Norma clung closer to Kerry. "I knew why you were with Laurel. . . . They didn't poison my mind, really. . . . I fought for you . . . even ran the risk of losing my foster mother. . . . It was your mind they were poisoning . . . about me!"

"Where's . . . Kennedy?" I asked huskily.

An instant Norma looked at Kerry. All her love and heroism were mount-

ing. She leaned over and kissed him.

"Yes . . . Larry . . . go . . . get him . . . he is our best friend!"

Kerry, head down, shouldered his way a foot ahead of me into the smother.

In the doorway we stumbled on Craig, eyes bulging, face distorted, mouth set, dragging out the half-conscious Strepoff.

Fernie flung herself on him, tearing to loosen his collar and neck-band, crying and kissing him, chafing his hands, smoothing his forehead, passionately.

Norma seized Kennedy, frantic to mother him.

"Fernie . . . the adventuress . . ." she whispered between orders to Kerry to help, "is . . . really . . . Madame Strepoff. . . . I just found . . . jealous . . . of me!"

Gasping, choking, Kennedy tried to smile at her, then turned as he felt my hand on his.

"Dead men—prisoners!" he muttered. "What a game Artifex plays!"



From the Credo of the Modern Young Man About Town

By John Torcross

I believe—

That the secret of life is to be perpetually pickled.

That no one, nowadays, ever thinks of thanking one's host or hostess.

That any dance that stops before 5 A.M. is a "dud."

That the best reason for marrying a girl is that she is pretty.

That dawn is something to be seen at the end of one's day.

That oranges, lemons, and grapefruit are grown for the sole purpose of making cocktail ingredients.

That anyone who feels well in the morning has spent a dull evening.

That a club library is a room to take a nap in.

That midnight occurs about 4 A.M.

That the chief beauty of any country place is its proximity to town.

That the most interesting thing in the theatre is the stage door.

That a week-end begins on Thursday and ends on Tuesday.

That women wear altogether too much clothing when they go in bathing.

That the most important people on earth are headwaiters, taxi drivers and bootleggers.

That all beautiful married women have terrible husbands.

That it costs a whale of a lot to live as one feels.

Poor Jean! She was so exquisite in her dainty little bathing suit—such jolly company for the rich crowd she had got in with—so tired of her shabby little home and her simple, unpretentious widowed mother! Was it any wonder she ran away?



Ashes

By Christine Dale

JEAN STAFFORD glanced down at her slim body exultantly. She was so lovely—clad sketchily in the little blue bathing suit—with her mop of bronze-gold hair flying—and her bare feet twinkling against the warm smooth sands of Dunn Harbor.

She was curiously sensual when you consider the provincial family that was her background, and the stern and "wholesome" upbringing that had been hers for seventeen

years. Yes, curiously sensual, consciously animal. The "summer resorters," she reflected with a sigh of satisfaction, had told her that she was like a bit of pagan statuary come to life. Again she glanced complacently toward her exquisitely molded breasts, her slim curved legs, her graceful dancing feet. Ah, the "summer resorters" understood her: those wild rich beings from the other side of life—the wonderful side.

All in a moment she recalled again

their careless revelry—the silky, lacy little garments that the girls wore next their perfumed skins—the camaraderie—born, perhaps, of the “nips” from jeweled flasks—the night-hours crammed with siren dance music—and the intoxicating love phrases of the clever, the well-bred.

“Jean! Jeanie!”

This was a shrill voice from the little house that jutted onto the beach, and the girl came back sharply to her own impecunious life, her mother, and—she turned faintly sick at the thought—the Ashes.

“I have decided that you may have the party this summer,” her mother informed her abruptly. “It seems only such a little time, to me, since they left us—but, after all, it will be your only eighteenth birthday, won’t it?”

Mrs. Stafford was a kindly soul in her grim, New England way. She set out a glass of milk and a plate of ginger bread on the kitchen table, and then she left the room in that heavy, ungracious manner of hers. Jean saw her, through the door, as she went towards the Ashes. She was arranging fresh flowers again—pale, lugubrious flowers, the color of death and old men’s eyes. . . .

THE ASHES had been a part of Jean Stafford’s life for six years now. It was during her twelfth year that her father and her only brother had been killed in the automobile wreck: humble sacrifices to a gay-party of the summer crowd who always vacationed at Dunn Harbor.

Mrs. Stafford had never recovered. After the double funeral she had brought home the ashes of the dead, which she mingled in a heavy black urn and placed in state on the cheap mantel. And, being the impressionable, sensitive child that she was, Jean never spoke of them—these, her father and her brother, horribly “preserved” in a little black bowl—but for months and years she had

fantastic nightmares, and she never went into the living-room without fighting down a nausea that rose to her throat. . . .

“Where’ll we have the party, Mother?” she asked suddenly. “Here?”

“Of course.”

“In—the parlor?”

“Where else, for heaven’s sake?”

(But that black urn—and her friends from the big hotel, who never spoke of death! They’d—*laugh—perhaps!*)

Jean began to speak then of the millinery shop that she and her mother meant to open next door. The family purse was slender enough, these days, and, at seventeen, Jean Stafford felt the burden of existence slipping all too swiftly to her reluctant shoulders. Of course the older woman occasionally spoke hopefully of Clarence Patterson, who owned the Dunn Harbor Garage, a great amount of ambition, and twenty-nine freckles—but Jean wanted a lover, not a “steady”!

So, when the next morning rolled around and Mrs. Stafford went to call her daughter, she found that Jean had gone. There was a note—pinned, pitifully, to the pillow—and her battered little bank was gone.

II

JEAN was ushered, ceremoniously, into Miriam Jeffries’ boudoir. She had come directly to the Jeffries’ home after the trip to the city—simply because she loved and worshiped the older girl. Miriam had been so good to her during those glorious summertimes of her awakening. . . .

Miriam, this morning, was scarcely awake, but the full light of the noon sun was already pouring through latticed windows and blue silk curtains. Jean, in her tremendous excitement, brought out her story all in a rush, and sat timidly—expectantly—at the foot of the bed.

"You did just right," said Miriam calmly. "Of course I was going to the beach myself next month with the rest of the gang, but I can put it off—and I'll love to have you with me. You're such an absurd and delightful child, you know, and you always amuse me."

Miriam made herself comfortable against a variety of lace cushions, and lit a cigarette with languid, graceful hands. An adept poseur—this Miriam.

They plotted then, with the *naïveté* of youth, for the days to come. Jean wrote a note to her mother to explain that she was "with friends," and that she would not be home until she had "found herself." She meant, of course, until she had found a husband. All girls do mean that anyhow.

SHE LOOKED adorable enough in Miriam's clothes. There was, for instance, the daring red crepe in which she met Larry Gresham. A skirt made wonderfully of scarlet silk petals and a bodice of velvet brocade that completely revealed her arms, her creamy back, and a subtle hint of her lovely young breast.

"Lord, what a wow of a party!" was the first comment young Gresham ever made to her, unromantic enough certainly—but Jean gazed at him with enchanted eyes.

"Let's go dance outside under the lanterns," he said then. "I'm so sick of the sound of cocktails being mixed—and girls laughing—C'mon, let's go!"

"You're such a little bunch of sweetness," he told her gently. (This was later, after their dance was over and they were sitting on the marble steps that led to a miniature lake on the Jeffries estate. A transplanted bit of old Italy, and, beside her, a man with black and passionate eyes, and a most endearing Kentucky drawl. Jean felt a sudden surge of

S.S.—Aug.—9

warmth go over her that brought a tingling ecstatic sense of life to her very fingertips.)

His hand was caressing hers, and his lips almost touched her hair.

"Do you swim a great deal, Lady of the Innocent Eyes?" he asked her. "Is that where the tan comes from?"

"I love to swim. I like the cool feel of the water, like—like nice people's hands." She broke off, laughing, adorably confused.

"Let's sneak out a couple of bathing suits and take a plunge into the lake. The crowd won't know the difference—they're drowned in benedictine by this time—and we'll pretend we're Venus and Apollo—or even the Fairbankses!"

He was wonderful—so gay, so alive, she thought. Already she had fallen madly, desperately in love with him, with all the ardor of her young heart.

"But we'd better wait a while," she protested.

"All right. Let's talk about ourselves. But first can't we imagine we've known each other a long, long time—and I shall put my arm around you, like a brother, you know—and—"

"Oh!"

"Why, of course," he promised immediately. "I shall be just like a brother, I said."

"Do all big-city men talk like you?"

"You've been going to the movies," he accused by way of response. "Dear little girl, there aren't any big-city men and small-town men. You can classify overcoats and shoes, but you can't classify human beings. Remember, Wonderful Child with the Irresistible Smile, that men are all plain human beings—whose brains just naturally die when they get anywhere near ninety-eight pounds of utter loveliness—oh Jean!"

(All of this in the delectable Southern accent. Suddenly he caught her to him, and kissed her feverishly

—and poor Jean Stafford *had* been going to romantic movies and reading, besides, such pages of red-hot fiction!)

However, they couldn't take the swim. Miriam chanced upon them some minutes later and lectured them both: they went back into the house meekly enough, but before they parted they made a superbly audacious engagement for the next evening.

III

IT WAS midnight when a foolish child with a sense of the dramatic crept up the steps to Larry Gresham's apartment. (A wise and very modern business woman told her later: "Thrust a boy into life and freedom and he'll burn his fingers on the flame too—yes, but did you ever notice how much tougher a boy's skin is than a girl's?")

But Jean knew nothing of wisdom then. The clever ones might have told her that Gresham had called her his "Lady of the Innocent Eyes!"—and then belied the endearment by asking her to do a most sophisticated and rather outrageous thing.

Larry wasn't there, however. He had said that he might be detained, and she made herself at home—timidly, first, then luxuriously.

A small supper was laid out, on a table that glistened with expensive linen and polished silver. She appropriated one of the orchids that adorned it, and tucked an olive into her cheek with a little air of guilt that was very young and very delightful.

Then she examined the room.

There was a naughty and consolingly beautiful picture that made her blush, and on another wall a collection of valuable old English sporting prints that her mother would have

dumped into the nearest waste basket. But vaguely Jean appreciated them.

There was also a couple of comfortable chairs drawn up to the blazing open fire, and a tableful of books matching their flamboyant covers with the collection of multicolored bottles that stood near them.

Jean lit a long Russian cigarette and reflected at some length. This apartment of Larry's! Why, he *lived* every second of the day. He never thought of Days of Judgment or friends who were "gone" or—other people's ashes! He was life and beauty, sex and adventure, all in one—and suddenly Jean burned with fury at the thought of Dunn Harbor and the years she had wasted there.

She wheeled on her gay little slippers—to confront the figure of a saint that was hung on the wall behind her!

Larry could have told her that it was a rare and priceless antique of more than common interest, but to Jean it meant musty churches and everlasting prayers to crumbled bones. . . .

Then she noticed the flowers that were clustered on the table beneath it—and, finally, a sinister and oddly shaped black urn! . . .

IV

LARRY flung off his overcoat irritably as he came in.

"I wonder why she didn't come," he commented aloud to the empty room. "It's just possible that she's gone back to the bucolic suitor she told me about. Yes, she's gone back to the Harbor all right—I know the kind. Oh—well!"

And, swearing a little, half humorously, he carefully extinguished his cigarette in the old black urn that served him as an ash tray. . . .



The Merry Magdalena

*Casuals, misfits, the ones whom life juggles—
they too seek to build something fine out of fate's material. . . .
Here is a glimpse of the struggle and its reward.*

By David Karsner

IT WAS long after midnight. Murdock was lying on his bed reading a cheap edition of Hardy's "Far from the Madding Crowd," which he had stolen that day from a second-hand book store. He could have bought it for a quarter—but he didn't have a quarter. A youth in such straits might, perchance, be able to wrest so small a sum from a passerby for a meagre meal to appease his physical hunger. But there are other hungers.

There was no tip on the gas jet and the thick yellow flame squirted thin coils of smoke in the room. There was a knock at the door and Murdock was startled. His first thought was that Mrs. Riley had come in the dead of the night to dispossess him from his lodgings. He had been expecting that ordeal almost momentarily, and the uncertainty that was sure to follow his eviction heightened the gloom that enveloped him.

Murdock turned the book face downward on the bed, rose languidly and opened the door.

"You don't mind if I come in and chat a little, do you?"

A young woman smiled her way in, and introductions seemed unnecessary. She seemed to feel at home instantly as she pulled off her hat and tossed it upon the bed. They had met before on the stairs and in the hall and had greeted each other with brief pleasantries.

There was a dingy sign in the parlor window that labeled this establishment, "Theatrical Boarding House," but those who lived within and the neighbors knew the sign was a "come on," a sneak and a liar. Still, you can't always be sure what hides behind a sign. "No, I don't mind. Come in." Murdock had a way about him of making people think he was always bored. He was the kind of person you might suppose was born tired.

HER EYES took in the room at a glance. She frowned. It was on the fourth floor back and the roof slanted down to the top of the iron double bed that sagged in the middle. There were a number of brown rings on the blistered paper on the ceiling where rain had leaked through, and the red roses on the wall looked pathetic with their petals scratched off by matches and soiled by many irreverent fingers. A dirty carpet bore evidence of human frailty, and the drawers of a bureau were stained and evil smelling. In the corner was a small closet, the shelf of which supported innumerable bottles that had once contained everything from perfumery to pills. Former lodgers had not had even the decency to take their weaknesses with them. A small window looked out upon a vista of crumbling chimneys and patched roofs. . . .

Mrs. Riley seemed to eye him suspiciously when she saw him come in and go out of the house. Already he owed her two weeks' rent, which he had met with promises to pay when he should find that elusive job. She was a hard-fisted woman, no doubt, and the dubious character of her many lodgers had not softened the harshness of her face. It looked like a post office blotter. It was smeared with meaningless impressions, and the corners were blunted and jagged.

Mrs. Riley carried in her worm-eaten heart an admixture of contempt and suspicion of all human kind. She believed that all men were cheats, dead beats and drunks. Her estimate of women was anything but lofty. She was secretly jealous of her young female lodgers, and she could whip her frozen emotions into an exquisite envy of those who she knew carried on affairs in their rooms.

Mrs. Riley really thought Murdock was honest. She knew he was not a drunk, but she had an open mind about the possibility of his being a dead beat. One night while she was placing her shoddy clothes on a trunk and preparing for bed she had intrigued herself into an almost perilous ecstasy over the thought of Murdock as her lover. She fell asleep at length with the galling knowledge that for her youth was leagues behind and passion a tombstone to which age may contribute only flowers of withered memory.

"TAKE a chair and be comfortable," said Murdock to his visitor. He motioned to the straight-back chair against the wall under the gaslight. He stretched himself again on the bed and turned his face toward her. She was looking at herself in a cracked mirror, primping and combing back an unruly lock of chestnut hair that had fallen across her brow. Murdock watched her take a powder puff from the folds of her handkerchief and brush it quickly across her nose and around her mouth and chin.

When she turned around she smiled at the youth looking at her and drew near him, standing for a moment by his side and gazing into his upturned face. She looked intently and questioningly at him as though she were making up her mind about something, and when, with a quick gesture, she ran her fingers through his hair and gave it a little pull, before she let go, anyone who had observed the scene would have known that she had reached a decision satisfactory to herself.

"You look tired. Are you?" she asked, walking around the bed to the chair and tilting it back against the wall.

"Yes, I am," Murdock replied. "So do you." They looked at each other steadily, each trying to delve deep into the other's mind and soul. Loneliness and the great hunger to be known and liked and appraised for one's intrinsic values, to be appreciated for what we think ourselves to be—these are the magnets that draw seeking ones into fraternal bonds if only for a moment's interchange of friendship. She noticed the book beside him.

"What are you reading?" she asked, not caring, nor intent upon his answer. He passed the book to her. She handled it awkwardly. She had no feeling for books. They were all closed to her. They were undreamt luxuries, like Pullman cars to tramps.

"I never heard of it—is it any good?"

Murdock felt it was useless to discuss the book with her. He did not feel, nor did he wish to appear, her intellectual superior. It would have been ridiculous for him to put on airs with her. He remembered he had stolen the book.

"Yes, so far," he replied casually. "I've only just started it. Do you like to read?"

She took a pack of cheap cigarettes from her handbag and lit one before she answered. She was about to put the pack back into her bag.

"Oh, I almost forgot my manners. Will you have a cigarette?" She threw

them to him. He took one and lit it.

"I don't believe I do like to read," she said, remembering his question. "I never read anything that sounded real to me—who in the name of God are these people who write all these books anyway? They must be grand men—nothing to do but sit down and write about beautiful girls and handsome men, and castles in Spain—and love that always comes out right in the end. There ain't nothing like that I ever heard of. I could tell them a thing or two that wouldn't look pretty in a book. Gawd, the men I've known!" Her flesh seemed to draw up in knots over her bones. Murdock looked at her with an inward pity. He had guessed the mode of her life on one of those days when he met her in the hall.

"I only read two novels—really *serious novels*—and they were fine to read." She moved her hand wearily over her face and pursed her lips to blow a ring of smoke that dashed itself to death against the slanting spotty ceiling.

"What were they?" Murdock pursued.

"Well, let me see. It's been so long ago I forget. I read one of them when I worked in the laundry, and the other during lunch hour—half hour I mean—in the department store. Oh, yes, now I remember! 'Lorna Doone.' I read that in the laundry—and 'When Knighthood Was in Flower.'"

There was a faraway look in her eyes, as though she were trying to recall that idyllic world of knights and flowers, to connect it somehow with her life as it was then and continue the chain to the present. Her thoughts were blurred and she gave it up. Memories, even dim ones, are sometimes so poignant.

"What's your name?" said Murdock suddenly. She was startled.

"What's the difference?" she countered. "What's a name got to do with my wanting to talk to you because I am lonesome and feel like it?" She was almost haughty.

"Well, if you want to know, my name's Annie Shannon."

She did not ask him his name. To her all men were nameless. They were suits of clothes covering hideous secrets that were dormant and violent by turn. She hated men and loathed women. She hated men because of their purchasing power, and she loathed women because she was one of them. Her resentment of life was a flaming banner forever flapping against the windows of her mind. She accused it, and yet there was a sweetness in life somewhere, somehow, if only you could capture it. That is what she was trying to do now in Murdock's room—to get away from the gross and brutal and to lave her hungering, twisted soul in fraternal floods as clear as crystal.

"WELL, ANNIE, some day I'm going to try my hand at this writing business." Murdock was surprised he had said that. What did she care, and what could she know about the great hunger in his soul? It was the first time he had ever given audible voice to his secret longing. Why had he chosen her as his confidant? He laughed quietly and asked her for another cigarette. She laughed boisterously. The idea to her was grotesque. It was a gargoye of the imagination. In her own mind she indexed his wish under vanity.

"You write a book! Say, don't make me laugh. People who write books are rich and take it easy."

"No," he put in, "most people who write books are poor and take it hard." He had read much of the struggles of the world's great ones. That put him on an even footing with them. It made him feel easy about himself.

Annie was unconvinced.

"Cut the comedy," she bantered. "You've got to be 'to the manor born,'" she quoted. "Say, listen, I'm hungry and I'd like you to quit dreaming and come out and share a steak with me. Will you?" Annie suspected Murdock's economic plight. She wanted to be a good fellow. She wanted to show him the depth of her longing for—for what? Understanding? Sympathy? Affection? She appealed to his

most potent weakness at the moment. Murdock was penniless. He had been living by his wits and they were frayed. He had been sponging on free-lunch counters in beer saloons at the crowded noonday hour for a week and more, and had been kicked out of several when spotted as a bum.

Annie bounded out of her chair, bringing it to the floor on all fours, and threw herself beside him. He did not stir. For an interminable moment she tucked her face into his neck and he could feel her heart pound against his body. To her he was clean and she was clean. Yesterday and tomorrow had nothing to do with this experience of ineffable peace and magnanimity en-

flame painting weird patterns over the scarlet roses on the wall.

"Tell me, now, honest, ain't you hungry?" Her voice was low and tender. It smoothed him. What a mother she might have made!

"Yes, I guess I am," he confessed. "But it'll only be a loan, you see?"

Annie sprang to her feet with the agility of a doe. Her cares and concerns dropped from her shoulders like an old cloak. She was as frisky as a young thing going on a May party. She abandoned herself completely to the mood of ephemeral happiness in which there would be no barter. She put on her hat, looked at herself in the cracked mirror and dabbed her nose with her

What was it that led Isabel Rayburn—nineteen, beautiful, talented—to seek Richard Du Maurier as her mate? Was it the mere physical attraction of a stunning young man for a wholesome, lovely girl? Was it the mere fever of modern, post-war America, where old standards are being assaulted so vigorously by youth? Or was it something deeper, finer, more elementary—something every girl and woman will recognize in herself—something every man must take into account? . . .

*This is the question which is answered by **The Eternal Huntress**, the brilliant novel which begins on page 7 in this issue of **SMART SET**. It tells a sensational story. . . .*

countered without any demonstration of primal passion. The touch of his hand upon her head blotted out all brutalities and bequeathed to her a dignity devoid of inferences. He was thinking of what he had said about the book. He was thinking aloud.

"I mean it—I am going to write a book some day. I don't know about what, but I'm going to write it. Maybe I'll put you into it, maybe I'll try to describe just this little scene—you and I in here, alone, both of us too hungry for affection to dare blight it and end it."

"Oh, God! How fine that is!" she said. They lay motionless, shielding their eyes from the yellow snake of

powder puff. She might have been going to a ball with her beau.

"Don't make any noise when you go down the stairs or Mrs. Riley'll think I'm giving her the slip," Murdock cautioned. "Skip that third step from the bottom the second landing; don't forget."

"Has she been dunning you?" Annie inquired. She knew his answer in advance.

"Not exactly that, but she looks mighty savage when she sees me," he said, as he put on his jacket and straightened his tie. Annie scowled when she thought of Mrs. Riley.

"The damned old wench! She's jealous as hell of me." Annie was in a

fine flare and her black eyes blazed her contempt for the landlady.

"I'll stake you what you owe her," said Annie. Murdock flushed. The thought of Annie giving him money humiliated him. He asserted his pride.

"Oh, thanks, but never mind that; I'll get a job soon and everything'll be O. K."

They went down the creaky stairs quietly and out into the street. They turned several corners and stepped into a little all-night restaurant. It was warm and cozy inside and the smell of food inflamed Murdock's appetite. Annie noticed it, but said nothing. She felt sorry for him and wanted to befriend him. Murdock liked her manner. He saw she was coarse and cynical, and terribly wise, but sweet withal, a friedly creature eager to spend itself in blissful ways of make-believe.

Annie ignored the sticky menu card in giving her order ("for two," she said) to the waiter. Then she waved him aside with a grand, imperious gesture. Murdock watched her intently. Women such as Annie, Murdock knew only by rumor and report. A kindly person would have said that the situation in which Murdock now found himself was "temporary embarrassment." Most assuredly he had been precipitated over a cliff into an abyss among strange people whose thoughts and habits of life were not his; when he came closely to grips with them, or they with him, he felt their resentment. He was swimming with alien fish. He had been born almost a goldfish. And here he was in a cloudy pool with toads and tadpoles.

Annie was the sort of girl whom Murdock's father and mother and all their kith and kin would have looked upon as "a domestic," and had they really discovered anything irregular in the way that Annie accepted life or fought it off they would have condemned her as effectually as Hawthorne has already described in his American classic. They would have tortured her to save her soul.

But Murdock never fitted precisely

into the group and grooves where chance had thrown him. His parents had called him wilful in his readiness to assert what he would or would not do, but he knew he was weak when the time arrived to make good his boast. It was often that way with him. And now at eighteen he was alone and drifting. He knew no trade and had been an unsatisfactory clerk. His mind dwelt upon greatness, yet, he had never mastered the simpler details of his own life. He dreamed of writing books. That permitted him to accept with becoming martyrdom the cruel and brutal odds and ends visited upon him. . . .

"Where'd you get the jewelry?" Annie asked, touching his middle finger. "It's a wedding ring, ain't it?"

"Yes. That was my mother's," he replied.

"Why didn't you 'hock' it when you were hungry on those days you've been telling me about?" He looked at her in amazement. Had she no sentiment? She divined his inquiring thought.

"Well, what of that?" she blurted. "You wouldn't forget your mother if you didn't have her ring, would you? Wouldn't she have sold it if you were hungry?" She paused. The thought choked him. He looked at the strip of gold.

"God—look what I've sold when I was hungry," she said.

Their eyes met. He felt his were filling and he dropped them to his plate. They went out of the restaurant and to Mrs. Riley's "Theatrical Boarding House." In the hall on the top floor Murdock kissed Annie and said "good night."

He took the ring off his finger and tucked it under his pillow. He wanted to caress it. Annie, in her room across the hall, tried to read a fifteen-cent novel. She picked it up and put it down three times. She lit a cigarette and smoked while she undressed. For a long while she lay awake. Dawn crept into her room through the apertures of the soiled lace curtains like a bashful minister.

II

MURDOCK woke early. He slipped out of the house quietly so as not to attract Mrs. Riley, already puttering about the house with her chores. He felt easy and stronger. It was cold in the street. March was shaking its mane of snow and sleet.

Murdock fumbled in his coat pocket for the gold ring. He took it out and looked at it, sighed and put it back. He walked until he came to the foot of the hill. A trolley car was coming over it. He looked up and down and saw no one. Now he would do it.

He took the ring out of his pocket and fingered it tenderly. He stepped toward the tracks. This was the time to do it. The car came down the hill and was gone. He would wait for the next one. . . . Over the hill he saw the trolley pole of the second car. He would do it now. It had to be done. It might change his luck. The car slipped past and was gone.

Why couldn't he do it? The trolley cars were moving more frequently now and early morning workmen, their chins tucked in their collars and their hands resentfully stuck in the depths of their pockets, were hurrying to their recurring toil.

Now he would do it. The third car nosed over the hill. Murdock stiffened his courage like a man passing through doors that would be forever closed to him. No one would see him. A milk wagon was lumbering along, but the driver was too sleepy to care what he saw. Murdock laid the gold band ring on the track. The motorman might have thought he was only picking up a match. He stepped back to the curb quite casually as though he were waiting for someone. The trolley rattled down the hill.

Two quick thumps—thump, thump—a space, and thump, thump, again. The car was gone. Those four thumps flattened something within Murdock. Had life flattened his mother like that trolley car flattened her wedding ring?

How terrible were those thumps of the trolley car as its wheels passed over the circle of gold! He picked it up and it was hot in the palm of his hand. The inscription was obliterated now. The wedding ring worn for twenty years was as it had been before it became a wedding ring, as it had been before the minister had said in the little country church, "With this ring I thee wed, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow"—mashed gold, and hot.

In a side street a jeweler had a dirty card stuck in his shabby window announcing "Old Gold and Silver Bought for Cash." When he opened his store Murdock entered and offered the mangled nugget. The jeweler first weighed it in his hand, and then touched its surface with acid.

"Pure gold," he said. He eyed Murdock suspiciously. Perhaps it would be best to ask no questions. He could get something for almost nothing. He was a shrewd little merchant but not cunning enough to amount to much. "That's eighteen carat," he announced.

He handed Murdock four dollars and fifty cents. \$4.50! You may imagine the importance of such a sum to one who had not had any money at all for two weeks, who stole a book that cost a quarter because he didn't have its price. Murdock was a man of affairs now. He had money! He controlled the power invested in four dollars and fifty cents! To one who has had nothing that is considerable. . . .

Murdock bought a cheap breakfast, got himself a pipe that cost fifteen cents and a nickel sack of tobacco. A man of affairs!

THAT day Murdock decided he would quit Mrs. Riley's place. Spring would soon be here and he could take care of himself out-of-doors. He had no money to pay her, anyway, and she would certainly put him out.

When Annie came to her room late at night she found a note under her door. She thought Mrs. Riley wanted her room. She struck a light and read:

Dear Annie:

Thanks for your great kindness to me. I enjoyed the talk we had together. I took your advice and sold the ring. Maybe it will change my luck. I'm getting out before you come home because I don't want you to help me anymore, and I know you would. Some day I hope I may do as much for you. You're awfully fine. I won't forget you any more than I'll forget the book I want to write. Good luck to you.

Murdock Lawson.

Annie folded the note and tucked it in her bosom. She tiptoed across the hall and entered the room that Murdock had vacated. She struck a match and looked around. She lit the gas and sat down on the side of his bed, crossed her legs and smoked a cigarette. She blew rings against the slanting ceiling and was fascinated as they spun into twisted strands. She flicked half her cigarette into the washbowl and walked over and raised the window. She looked out over the tops of broken chimneys silhouetted against the moonlit sky.

"Oh hell!" said Annie. She jerked her head back as though she had choked on something in her throat, turned out the light, closed the window, and went into her own room where she lit another cigarette and buried her face between the pages of a musical weekly.

III

SIX MONTHS pass. It was September. Murdock had found no work. He was a reluctant tramp, sleeping wherever he could find shelter. His associates, such as they were, hailed from the dusty paths of cities and states that Murdock had never seen. He was one of them, and he listened to their boastings of long and short terms in jails, of exploits that would dazzle the most daring. The lives of most of them were colorless enough, but their imaginations soared when it came to swapping stories. The one who could boast to the longest term in prison instantly won a mark of supreme distinction among the others. Murdock was a tenderfoot.

MURDOCK LEARNED the ways and habits of this strange nomadic clan and easily adapted himself to them. He particularly liked Murk Maguire, a youth of twenty, who boasted three "turns" in different reformatories and threw out his chest in saying he was an alumnus of a western penitentiary. Back in the recesses of Murdock's mind he tucked all this away. Some of it would go into that book.

"They juggled me in Omaha," Maguire was saying to Murdock, whom they now called "Dock," one sunny afternoon as they walked along a dusty road. Maguire was rarely reminiscent, and when he spoke of himself it was only in fragments.

"I did those three years standing on my ear," he said proudly. "Did you ever do a 'bit'?" he asked Dock.

"No, I never did," was the response.

"Well, then, you ain't graduated into the alumni," Murk answered disdainfully. They had come to a park, a favorite rendezvous, and sat down. Murk fished in his pocket for a corn-cob pipe. A policeman passed and levelled a menacing eye at them.

"It's hard to see the image of God in the eyes of them chaps, ain't it?" said Murk, looking at the swinging figure of the policeman.

Dock was about to answer when he got a slap on the back that nearly sent his pipe out on the walk. He turned around, expecting to see brass buttons, but what he did see was almost as overwhelming. The figure behind him was that of "Rusty" Roberts, erstwhile companion of the road, a tow-headed Viking of twenty-four, who had slipped from the circle of his familiars some weeks earlier. . . . But what a "Rusty!" He was dressed up as though he had just stepped through the plate glass window of a tailor shop. A superior grin flitted across his face.

"I'm through with you guys," said Rusty, haughtily.

A sneer enveloped Murk's face.

"Fact is," continued Rusty, "I was through with this kind of stuff a month ago."

"Oh don't think we can't get along without you," put in Murk.

"That's all right," retorted Rusty, "but don't get fresh, see!"

Murk accepted the rebuke with an ingrowing growl.

"I've been working at a reg'lar job for a month," said Rusty, "and that's how I got togged out." He surveyed himself proudly and ran his thumb and forefinger down the crease of his serge trousers.

"Job!" Murk shrieked, in outraged and supercilious horror.

"Well, that's all right," Rusty retorted, defensively. "There ain't nothing to this bumming around, wearing your eyes out looking for a flop at night, saving the paint on a dollar whenever you happen to meet up with one, and just looking at the pretty girls and they looking scared-like at you, and you wishing you had one. Nothing to it! I'm through, see! That goes for here and hereafter, forever and forever, amen!"

"Now brothers, let us pray," Murk mocked. Dock was silent. How he wished he could find a job; or, better still, how he wished the job might find him—a job that would let him write what he felt about the things he saw and thought he apprehended. . . .

"That's it, eh? Skirt crazy!" Murk grinned contemptuously. Then turning to Dock: "Well, we ain't fell to that level yet, have we, Dock?"

Dock smiled silently. . . . He was lonely enough and the life of a tramp was not for him. Eighteen and a tramp! Murdock Lawson! If those who knew him had but known!

Rusty unfurled what was in his mind with as much ceremony as the grand chief of a patriotic order exhibiting the flag.

"I'm postin' bills for thirty a week," he said.

"Book-keeper?" Dock inquired.

"No, billboards. Swell job—out doors all day—free tickets for the show Monday night when they paper the house. Eight hours and nothing to it. Shame to take the money!"

Rusty lit a cigarette and jangled the change in his pocket. He told how he had gone back to his home in Cumberland for a visit to his mother who lived with her spinster sister, and how glad they were to see him "making something of himself." He produced a ponderous gold watch. It was the kind of thing that Murdock's grandfather Albert used to wear hitched to a lariat. Rusty pried open the back of the case that clacked like the door of a cell. It had been given to his grandfather by the members of the Ancient and Exalted Order of the Knights of the Tiger's Eyes on the occasion of the recipient's ascension to the honored post of Master Hunter, and had come down through the family like a title of nobility.

"The old lady said she was keeping this for me until the time I went straight and quit guys the likes of you," said Rusty, squinting an eye in Murk's direction.

Murk was running over in his own mind an appraisal of the watch in pawn.

"Well, I'm on velvet and sittin' pretty," said Rusty. He spoke like a man eager to create suspense. He was the kind of a chap who, had he been a sheriff, might have discussed the price of electric current with the condemned man strapped in the chair.

"That ain't all, either," he at length volunteered. "I'm going to be married next Tuesday by the Justice of the Peace at Elicott City to the sweetest little Merry Magdalene you ever did see. She's a pippin!"

It was too much. Murk and Dock both felt like they were riding backward on a merry-go-round. Still, people got jobs every day, and some of them got married and lots of them died. Any one, or all of those things could have happened to Rusty the same as another. Why not?

"Married!" quoth Murk. "Oh, Lord!"

"Well, I might as well congratulate you, Rusty," said Dock, extending his hand.

Murk was no man for the amenities, but he smiled blandly.

"Yes, married!" said Rusty with finality. "I got my eyes on a little two-story house out on Payson Street with a yard in back to keep pigeons and rabbits."

"Can you beat that, Dock? We're bustin' right into society." Murk brushed his hands over his eyes as though he were waking from a long slumber among far off things.

"Next Tuesday morning at ten o'clock, see," said Rusty. "You guys want to be there."

Rusty was no piker. In their confederate days the three had shared and shared alike. They always split the pot three ways. He had saved sixty-two dollars from his wages toward this great adventure, and when he told his mother of it she had gone to the savings bank and added a hundred more, and his spinster aunt had contributed twenty-five. He had \$180 in all, and, with the air of a banker giving his postman a Christmas gift, he peeled off two tens and gave one each to Dock and Murk, with the admonition that they should 'spruce up and look like they were going somewhere.' . . .

Well, there comes a time when shock is no longer effective. You remember how it was during the war. "12,000 Mowed Down on the Marne." "Teutons Advance on Paris." "Belgian Nurse Shot by Huns." "8,000 Perish from Typhus." "Allies Slaughter 8,500 on Aisne." "4 British Steamers Sunk by U-Boats." You remember how it went, day after day, for four years. The poor man winced and turned to the "Sport Page." Business men followed the markets as usual. Women, rich and poor, sought the effronteries of dress and baked bread, went motoring and washed the windows. The war became a part of the daily grind. You accepted it, without relish, as you accept the obligation of rent.

"She sure is a wonder," he was saying to himself. "She's had a battle of it, I guess, like the rest of us, but I don't care nothing about that, and we

agreed we'd ask no questions. What's gone ain't no more, and that's that. She volunteered to tell me enough, though, to make me see she'd had a hell of a time of it."

Murk and Dock were silent. They knew well enough Rusty hadn't ensnared himself with a royal princess. He wouldn't have risked it, even had the chance come to him. He was level-headed in such matters. He knew one had to keep more or less on his own level—it was dangerous to seek below yourself, and folly to soar above. Different kinds of birds flew so high and no higher. Different kinds of fish swam in their own peculiar depths. It was so with mankind. . . .

"She's a nifty kid, alright," Rusty was saying. "She's a manicure in the new Greek barber shop down by the station. A swell looker, Annie is."

"Annie. . . ." said Murdock. "The first woman who ever gave me a hand-out was named Annie—"

Murk shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"Hell," he said, "the first woman that ever gave me a hand-out's a grandmother by this time, prob'ly."

"Annie Shannon ain't no grandmother," put in Rusty proudly. "She's a chicken—she ain't a day over twenty-one."

Murdock looked at Rusty.

"Where'd you meet her?" he asked, quietly.

Rusty's glance was supercilious.

"At my boardin' house," he said with proper pride. "Riley's, on Center Street."

He squared his shoulders in their elegant serge draping and opened his lips for a final shot which would once and for all reveal the gulf between a couple of bums and a man of property, a citizen of the world, a gay dog with a place in society and money in his pockets.

"That's where all the actors and actresses hang out," he said proudly. "It's a swell dump, believe me."

J How many divorces are mistakes? . . .
Marriages are like people—unexpected things happen to them. Sometimes fate plays a cruel trick and the marriage fails when it really ought to have succeeded. . .
Miss Gatlin's delightful story of stage people helps us to understand the problem.



The By-Path

By Dana Gatlin

JOAN sat out on the sunny "deck" of the luxurious seaside hotel and tried to pretend she was really at sea. By half-closing her eyes she could almost ignore the rolling-chairs on the

boardwalk beneath, and focus only on that limitless expanse of blue which was the ocean, and that vaster blue beyond which was the sky. It was a heavenly day for January, and the air held a soft

hint of coming spring—but the woman basking in the steamer-chair was bored. She had been ordered to Atlantic City to convalesce from the "flu," and she hadn't found any congenial friend free to accompany her; she had been here nearly a week, now; her own thoughts and even this perfect weather, unaccompanied, were getting monotonous.

Now and again she brought her eyes back from sunlit infinity to let them rest on the occupant of another steamer-chair nearby. A girl well worth looking at. Lovely, indubitably; a dark and languid type of beauty—perfection of features and soft coloring and a certain indolent poise. She was dressed modestly yet the effect was striking rather than demure.

"An actress," Joan thought to herself. A judgment not without authority for Joan, though now wearing no conspicuous ear-marks, had herself once been a "professional."

The assured, languid beauty was reading a thick sheaf of big typed pages bound in heavy blue paper.

"A play 'script'!" said Joan to herself.

She was interested. And when, presently, the lovely reader was summoned to the telephone and carelessly left her literature lying on her chair, a sudden gust sent it swirling from its resting-place. Joan rose to capture it. On the blue cover was typed, in capitals, "WHY MATRIMONY?" BY MAURICE HOLDEN.

Joan couldn't help but peep inside. Her curiosity was natural, for Maurice Holden had once been her husband.

She was so absorbed that she failed to notice the girl's return until the girl stood at her side.

Then, apologetically: "The wind tried to blow it away and I picked it up. I couldn't resist glancing at it—I'm so interested in the theatre. I hope you don't mind."

"Oh, no—it was very kind of you," said the beauty, condescending to graciousness. Then, with a fine casualness: "It's my new play."

"Oh," said Joan. "How thrilling."

The beautiful girl smiled amiably.

"Mr. Holden just finished it this week. He wrote it specially for me—we'll go into rehearsal as soon as I get a little rest down here."

"Is Mr. Holden going to produce it, too?" asked Joan, looking properly impressed.

"Oh, yes," complacently.

"How splendid it must be to be working with such a successful playwright and producer—you're in luck!"

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. But Mr. Holden wants me to have a real chance. He knows I've been held back."

"Held back—I suppose there's a lot of petty jealousy in the theatre," Joan murmured.

"You've said something!" concurred the girl, yet not allowing her haughty repose to be ruffled. "But talent's bound to come to the top in due time."

JOAN, professionally trained, considered the girl before her. Had she talent—had she, really? Or wasn't it merely her beauty that counted? Maurice was so quick to spot talent, or the lack of it. Still . . . this girl with her striking loveliness . . . perhaps Maurice . . .

Aloud she asked:

"And Mr. Holden has discovered your talent—?"

The girl smiled serenely.

"Well, he's giving me the lead in this play."

To Joan that serenity was strangely offensive; but she wanted to hear more about Maurice, so she pursued:

"How wonderful to have inspired such confidence in such a man! You must find it very stimulating."

"Oh, yes. Mr. Holden's been very helpful," the girl conceded. Then, letting a trace of self-consciousness glimmer through her superb calm: "He takes a great interest. In fact, he's coming down here tomorrow—he wants to see me. He just now called me on the long distance."

Joan bent quickly to adjust her steamer-rug, so her face was hidden as, in a rather muffled voice, she repeated:

"Tomorrow. Coming *here*?"

"Yes," confirmed the beauty.

"Coming to talk about the play, I suppose," murmured Joan from the vicinity of her rug.

"Oh, yes, we'll talk about the play. But then he's one of my dearest friends besides—I'll be very glad to see him." Again that self-consciousness mingling with the complacency.

Joan straightened up from her rug.

"I've heard he's a very handsome, fascinating kind of man—one hears about celebrities, you know."

"He is," the girl corroborated suavely. Then: "Of course I suppose you've heard the wild stories if you've heard of him. Everything's bound to be exaggerated when a person's as famous as Maurice Holden," proudly, rather than defensively.

"I have heard a little," Joan admitted, "but doubtless it was exaggerated." Then, casually: "He was married once, wasn't he—and divorced?"

"Yes—he married a girl on the stage. They didn't get along very well—she wasn't the kind to hold a man like him."

"Did *he* tell you that?" her voice suddenly sharp.

The girl glanced at her curiously.

"Oh, no, he never talks about his former wife. His marriage is a closed episode—I imagine he doesn't like to remember it."

"I wonder what she was like—the wife; some simpering little doll-face, likely."

"No, I've heard she was really quite clever in her way," said the beauty, with a fine charitableness. "Made quite a hit in her day—but she left the stage when she married and for some reason didn't go back after the divorce. Felt she couldn't 'come back,' I guess. And just sort of disappeared off the map." She sighed commiseratingly. "Too bad—to have lost both her husband and her art—I can't help feeling sorry for her."

Joan shook herself free of her rug rather abruptly, and rose.

"Well, this has been most interesting for me—it's fascinating to come in

touch with celebrities. But I've a sudden whim for a rolling-chair—people get restless when they're convalescing."

The beauty smiled with the graciousness becoming a "celebrity."

"Oh, have you been sick?" sympathetically. "I'm never sick—don't know what it's like to feel even tired. My constitution's really disgusting!"

"There's nothing so much the matter with my own constitution," Joan retorted with some asperity. "Almost anyone can catch the flu."

II

THAT night across the big waste of the dining-room, sparsely dotted with diners at this season, at a far table she again saw the self-pleased beauty—Maurice Holden's *protégée*. She looked lovelier than ever in a gray chiffon frock so simple that one wondered why it was so arresting. There was a man with her, seated with his back to Joan, who found herself craning for a glimpse of his profile. When she was finally rewarded her heart gave a bound and plunge, though there seemed nothing about that masculine face to cause sudden feminine palpitations. The man had an abnormally large head, bald on top, and insignificant features the most outstanding of which was a pair of huge, horn-rimmed spectacles—they gave him an owlish look.

As the man turned his head, clear around, Joan felt an instinct to dive under the table. He was looking squarely at her—the girl had evidently pointed her out. Her heart for a long second stood still. But he didn't bow. Only the girl inclined her head indifferently.

The couple left the room first, and Joan kept her eyes downcast as she felt them passing her. But when, after her solitary meal and before going up to her solitary room, she stopped for her mail, she found the owlish-looking man loitering by the desk.

He held out his hand eagerly.

"Joan! It's certainly good to see you—you're a sight for tired eyes!"

She shook hands warmly, and her voice was warm and not quite steady.

"It's good to see you too, Simmy—you look just as natural! Why, it isn't right for a man to let—let's see, how long has it been?—to let six years roll over him without touching him. You should look older!"

"You haven't grown any older yourself," he retorted. "Just the same—a little soft-eyed scamp out of fairyland—Peter Pan! But you *are* a little thinner, maybe."

"I've been pretty sick with the flu—that's why I'm here—to bask and eat and grow fat."

"Staying long?"

"Oh, I don't know—might dash away any minute. Tomorrow maybe—you never know what you may do when you're bored."

"H'm," he observed. Then: "What are you doing this evening? Anybody with you?"

"No; that's why I may make a bolt—I came down alone."

"Then let's get together and have a little visit. Talk—Lord, but it'd seem good to have an old-time talk with Joan!"

She hesitated.

"Please," he urged. "Don't have to talk about anything that'd be—disagreeable. No reason why we shouldn't be friendly, is there? I've got a girl on my hands, but I'll introduce her to somebody who can either make love to her or dance with her. That'll keep her entertained."

Joan flashed him a mischievous look.

"I believe I met your young lady this afternoon."

"Yes, she told me."

"We had quite a little talk. Have you—given me away?"

He shook his head. "No. She thinks you a little person, quite attractive, to whom she kindly gave a thrill by revealing her estate."

Joan made a moue. "She doesn't exactly dislike herself, does she?"

"Not exactly. She's a peach to look at, but a bit heavy to talk to."

A LITTLE later, lounging comfortably in a big glass-enclosed room overlooking the moonlit ocean, "Atlantic City's not so bad in the winter, is it?" Joan said. "All the hordes who've just got money and brought it here—in the winter they find somewhere else to take it. One can breathe—even out there in the lobby amidst the Pompeiian splendors."

Simeon Weyl didn't answer but lay back in his wicker chair, smoking, and looking at her from behind those big spectacles. Joan wasn't hard to look at. Not beautiful in the obvious, flawless way his late dinner-companion was beautiful. Plenty of flaws, here, to mar perfection, yet the flaws were of a kind to make imperfection seem somehow charming. There were freckles on Joan's nose. And her features were irregular. Her mouth, particularly, was too large; this defect was all the more conspicuous from her trick of smiling with her mouth a little to one side—but Simmy found himself waiting and watching for that sidewise smile. Her hair was brown, of the loose-tendriled kind that loves to sport with the wind. Her eyes were—but the color of her eyes didn't seem to matter while you were talking with her; you were kept busy trying to count the different expressions in them. They were now softly meditative.

"You were saying a while ago," she resumed as Simmy didn't at once speak, "that Miss—?" She halted interrogatively.

"Miss West—Lorraine West."

"What a pretty name! Is it her own?"

He shrugged. "So far as I know."

"No matter. You intimated she's a bit 'heavy' unless one's making love to her. I was wondering—"

"Yes?"

"If Maurice's interest in her is entirely professional. He's so canny—and she doesn't strike me as being exceptional stellar material."

"Maurice has done wonders with pretty crude material in his time."

"I know. When he couldn't have his pick. Of course she's a lovely thing, but—"

"Oh, I guess he'll make good with her," assured Simmy. Then, after a little pause: "But as you surmised his interest isn't entirely professional."

She nodded, seemed to ponder; then, seriously:

"I've often thought it would be a good thing for him to marry again."

Simmy's big glasses were owlishly non-committal. "What's made you think that?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know—he's been sort of at loose ends. It might help him—in ways—if he were more bound. But then," with a little laugh, "that wouldn't work, either. Maurice is not one to ever tolerate being bound."

"As a matter of fact," Simmy said slowly, "he's been thinking of marriage—quite seriously."

She glanced up rather quickly. "Oh, has he?"

"Yes; more than once, the last year or so. In fact Lorraine herself is, I believe, the last object of his tentative matrimonial ponderings."

She couldn't repress a little gesture of distaste. "Oh, Simmy!—*that* girl. *She'd* never make him happy—she's just a pretty—"

Then she broke off abruptly.

"Well, don't worry," Simmy said. "He'll never marry her."

"Why not?"

"She has a rival."

"Rival?"

"Yes."

"Who?" queried Joan sharply. Simmy looked at her gravely.

"The woman his former wife used to be," he said.

At that Joan gave a laugh at once merry and derisive.

"Oh, fiddlesticks," she said. "I thought maybe you were going to give a real reason. But *that!* Maurice isn't in love with me!" and she laughed again.

"Maybe not," Simmy agreed.

"And you should know, if anybody, that he was 'out of love' with me long before I left him."

"Maybe so," Simmy agreed again.

"And Maurice isn't sentimental. He'd be the last person to drag up romantic

regrets. He's temperamental—but there isn't an ounce of sentiment in him."

"I guess you're right, Joan. You know Maurice pretty well."

"I ought to—I lived with him for five years."

"And I've been with him sixteen—ever since he borrowed all the junked sets and 'props' in town to put on his first show—on a shoestring."

"You've been a wonderful help to Maurice, Simmy. I sometimes think if it hadn't been for you—" Her eyes shone on him softly. "And Maurice has always appreciated you. He appreciates what it's meant—your sticking to him through thick and thin."

"Well, I know what's it's meant to me, too," said Simmy soberly. "I've got no one of my own—and I liked Maurice from the start. I can still see him—full of fire and enthusiasm—anxious for the gamble. He was a darn likable kid."

"Yes, he's always likable," she agreed—"even when he's selfish and ruthless."

"Well, a man's got to be selfish and ruthless when he bucks up against what Maurice has. Few men have fought such odds—and come out ahead."

"But he liked it—the gambles and risks and excitement. That's what he *did* like."

"Yes—he used to."

"Used to?" She gave a little laugh with a tinge of irony in it. "I don't hear very much, but from what I do hear Maurice hunts—and finds—plenty of excitement yet."

"Well, Maurice's been on the loose," Simmy admitted, "but that's different—that kind of excitement."

"Different?"

He didn't answer at once, then spoke slowly, as if choosing his words. "You see," he said, "it's pretty hard on a man sometimes to be too successful. That may sound queer, but men such as Maurice—those restless, ambitious, adventurous temperaments—get the most fun from life when it's none too easy. And when things soften up—well, everything sort of loses its salt. Everything's tasteless, dull—prosaic."

Joan nodded.

"I see. And frightfully hard on Maurice—to find life gone prosaic; the whole of life!" She smiled an odd smile which was part amusement, part gravity and part something else. "It was hard enough when he found his mere marriage going stale!"

"Have you got cynical, Joan? I don't like it. It's not like you."

She shrugged.

"Perhaps I've changed. One can change—even if one keeps one's figure and complexion—in six years, you know."

He scrutinized her from behind those thick lenses.

"I've thought about you often. Are you happy—happier than you were?"

She shrugged again.

"I don't think so much about being unhappy—don't think much about the subject at all. I suppose that means I'm happy. Look at that moonlight on the water—a magic carpet! Would you call it silver or golden?"

"I wouldn't call it anything," said Simmy. "Tell me, Joan," and his usually non-committal glasses registered anxiety as he leaned forward, "you haven't let yourself grow hard, have you—not you?"

"I'm not hard," she returned, looking softly out at the magic carpet. "I'm sensible." She gazed silently a moment, and then: "I've learned one sensible lesson, Simmy—those who have no deep affections avoid much of life's unhappiness."

"You sound unfeeling!"

"Perhaps—I don't know. Peace is for the—unfeeling. It's only in proportion as we *feel* about anything that anything can matter; if we don't care, nothing can matter."

As he didn't answer she turned to him with a merry little laugh. "Don't you think it's wise to grow sensible, Simmy?"

He leaned back with the effect of a sigh.

"Are you really leaving tomorrow?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know—perhaps."

"Maurice is coming tomorrow."

S.S.—Aug.—10

"Yes; your beautiful young lady told me."

"Is that why you're leaving?"

The woman's smile was serene and free. "Why should that influence me one way or the other? Maurice's comings or goings have no bearing on my life."

Simmy, the owlishly imperturbable, looked rather dejected.

BUT, that night, as Maurice Holden's former wife brushed out her wayward curls, she regarded her reflection with a curious half-smiling gaze. Tenderness, pain and ironic amusement were blended in that enigmatic smile. Finally, "How absurd!" she said, and snapped off the light.

III

THE next day Simeon Weyl, lunching with his celebrated chief and with the latter's latest *protégée*, kept glancing round the cavernous room and toward the doorway with a furtive air of expectancy. But Joan—if it was Joan he was looking for—did not appear. She must be lunching in her room, else already had flitted away.

The little three-cornered party was not too merry. Maurice was in an obviously bad humor.

He was a slender, wirily-built man, this outstanding figure of the theatrical world. He looked somewhere between thirty-five and forty—young for such spectacular success. His movements were quick, with a suggestion of restlessness. He wore clothes of expensive cut but wore them carelessly—nothing of the fop about him. His hair was dark and smooth; his eyes, very dark, too, looked as if they could smile engagingly, eagerly, but today they were moody. Lorraine, more animated than her wont, was trying with persistent amicability to win him from his sulky mood, but her efforts seemed only to irritate him—an irritation he didn't trouble to conceal.

"What a wonderful day," she breathed, looking out the window and

registering dreaminess. "The sky and water as blue as—blue. It's almost like—"

"Almost like California," Maurice finished for her. "Yes, I know."

"Why, how do you know? You've never been there."

"But you've been there."

This answer seemed to puzzle her. As she puckered her brows, he regarded her with a sardonically quizzical grin.

"I dream of going back," she said at length, registering dreaminess again. "I can see it all—some day. A sort of white villa—marble maybe, with pillars, and steps leading down—like a picture we made once."

"That kind of dream is famous," said Maurice—"almost as famous as that kind of picture."

"I don't know what you mean," she complained. "You're cross today."

"I apologize," not very apologetically. "I didn't get much sleep last night."

"Oh, you were out on a party!" registering rebuke. "Naughty boy!"

He didn't answer; lighted a cigarette.

"You shouldn't go on such wild parties," she persisted, laying a lovely hand on his sleeve.

He ignored the hand. "Not unless I take you along—" with a return of the sardonic smile.

She appeared to ponder; then, on a new tack:

"Tell me something about that play you're so keen on—the Big One—that you were having trouble with. Have you got it going yet?"

"There'd be no part in it for you, Lorraine," bluntly. "It's over your head."

"I'd hoped maybe—well, tell me something about it, anyway. You were so frightfully keen—have you—"

"Oh, for the Lord's sake, don't pretend to be interested in things you don't understand. Nobody expects it of you."

"You're rude, Maurice," pouting.

"I know I am. I'm all in. Forgive me."

NO, the luncheon wasn't merry. And, a few hours later, when the two men swung into a stride down the

boardwalk, Maurice's face was glum to exasperation.

"Phew!" he said. "I had to play hide-and-seek to beat it—Lorraine wanted to come along—but after three solid hours! Sometimes that girl oppresses me like a featherbed."

"I thought you were nutty about Lorraine," Simmy observed.

"A man would be nutty to be nutty—about her."

"Well, you picked her yourself—you put her in this show—wrote the piece for her."

"Yes, and it'll go; *she'll* go—if I stick on the job."

"Well, then," asked Simmy, "what's the complaint?"

"God knows." Maurice strode along, staring ahead with lustreless eyes. "Bored with the job, I guess. If I stick, the show and the girl will be a success—but what's the percentage?"

"Well, the benefit to the girl—that's one thing, maybe. She'll be grateful to you."

"Too damn grateful!"

"Why did you ever begin with her, then?"

"God knows," once again, apathetically. Then: "I suppose I'm a cad. But last night—this whole week—I feel all in, pretty sick. You know how a man feels."

"Yes, I know," said Simmy. To his eyes the bodily sickness of the other was trivial beside that dejected inertia of spirit.

"I was downright sick this morning," Maurice went on. "Didn't want to come. Didn't want to go anywhere. But didn't want to stay home, either. Didn't want to see anybody, not even you—but couldn't stick my own society. That's the way I feel—fed up. Fed up to the gills."

"Yes, I can see."

"You *do* see," Maurice laughed a half-shamed laugh. "And you've been seeing for a long time, Simmy, though you're the kind that sits tight. I know you've been watching and condemning and stewing, and it's made me feel sorry

in a way. But not too damn sorry—I wish I could care more."

Simmy didn't answer and they strode on a few paces in silence; then Maurice broke out:

"If I could only *care*—about anything! *Want* anything! I get drunk—but that seems to do no good; because I don't really want to get drunk, I guess. It's something else I want, and I don't know what it is. What is it that gets into a man, Simmy, when it would seem he's got everything in his hand life can offer—and everything seems just plain no-account?"

"You used to know what you wanted," said Simmy, "and you knew well enough when you got it. And already you'd be bounding after something else you wanted!"

Maurice nodded.

"Queer, isn't it? And do you remember how susceptible to women I used to be? Always seeing fascinating, irresistible allurements here and there. Well, that's gone, too—clear burned out. I try to get allured just as I try to get drunk—but all I get is a bad after-taste. I sometimes feel I never want to see a whiskey-bottle or a woman again."

"Speaking of women," Simmy said then, casually, "Joan's here."

"Joan! Here? In Atlantic City?"

"In the hotel."

"In the hotel—*our* hotel?"

Simmy nodded. Then: "That is, she was here last night. She spoke something of leaving today."

"Then you talked to her!"

"Yes, we had quite a little visit last night."

"How was she? How did she look?"

"Very much the same—that same elfin-note about her; she always did remind me of a feminine version of Peter Pan."

"Yes," said Maurice reminiscently, "I remember you used to call her that. Not a bad comparison, either. And not entirely her looks; more a something in her personality, something—elusive."

Simmy glanced at him.

"I never knew you found Joan elu-

sive. I thought she was rather an open book to you—a little too much so, perhaps."

"Oh, perhaps; but one gets a little different angle on things, now and then, when seen in perspective. It was just a fancy."

"Well," said Simmy, "I always thought you could have made capital of Joan's personality and her gifts. Never could see why you took her from the stage when you married her."

"I was up to my eyes in other things—everything was breaking then, at one time. Besides, I didn't care particularly to have my wife on the stage. And Joan was very tractable about it."

"Yes," Simmy concurred, "Joan was always tractable."

"For my part," Maurice went on, "I don't believe she ever cared specially for the footlights. After the smash I offered to put her back—we parted good friends, in a way. But she said no; preferred just slipping away to wherever she went—with that legacy from her aunt."

Simmy's lips tightened just a trifle, but he did not speak.

"Well, tell me something about her," said Maurice. "You say she hasn't changed?"

"Not in looks, but—"

"But—?"

Simmy looked away, hesitating. Maurice asked quickly:

"Did she seem in good spirits?"

"Oh, yes—guess Joan's always in good spirits."

Maurice looked, oddly, a little disappointed. "Yes, that's Joan's way. I don't believe anything in the world could make her—"

He broke off, then put another question:

"By the way, has she remarried?"

"No—that is, she didn't say so; I didn't ask her."

THERE fell a silence while the two men walked along briskly. That moody lethargy had partly dropped away from Holden. His companion glanced at him, stealthily, a time or

two before he voiced his next remark.

"D'you know," he said, "I've always thought it half a pity you and Joan didn't understand each other better."

Maurice came out of his thoughts with a somewhat disagreeable laugh. "We understood each other too well."

"Well, maybe. What I meant was you two never discovered that, instead of losing each other, you'd never really found each other. And that if you'd ever learned that you two could never entirely find each other, *then* you'd never have lost each other."

The younger man stared at him honestly bewildered.

"For a sensible man like you, Simmy, to start talking backward and in circles!"

"I can't express myself cleverly," said Simmy modestly. "I'm not a playwright."

"Well, if you were, you'd never have been able to build one of those domestic taradiddles of 'misunderstanding' out of our case," somewhat bitterly. "That was the main trouble—too darn much understanding. Joan and I got to the point where we had no illusions left."

"Maybe you're right," said Simmy.

"And yet," Maurice pursued, turning reminiscent again, "there was something rather fine about that frank kind of relationship; nothing held back—everything aboveboard."

"Yes."

"It was really unusual—I don't believe you'd find it often. Especially not in women," he concluded. "You wouldn't every day find a woman who'd stand for—that is, who would see things in their true and logical aspect."

"No," agreed Simmy.

Maurice seemed inclined to dwell on the subject.

"We made an agreement when we first married—never any concealments. We were both to feel free and unhampered—Joan as well as I. It was as though we had a beautiful garden, filled with flowers, which belonged to us both jointly. Yet one of us might perhaps, now and then, see another garden with some beautiful flowers which was not in our own garden, and might pick that

blossom for himself—and then feel free to come home and tell the other. And the other, instead of raising ructions, would understand."

"You express yourself beautifully," murmured Simmy—"the scheme has a fine, large sound. And you picked your stray flowers, didn't you?"

"Well, I never kept anything from Joan. She knew I was keeping faith with her—in *our* way of keeping faith."

Simmy didn't speak.

"Oh, I know I was a brute—a cad, you may say. Abominably selfish. If I could—oh, well. But Joan was always amiable and sweet. Never any tears or upbraiding or ructions. That's why I say she's an unusual, understanding woman. She appreciated as well as I that the problem of close companionship is the most difficult one in the world. Marriage is always a strain—disillusionizing. But that's why, even after romance was gone, we remained good friends. Why we parted good friends."

"Yet the parting came," observed Simmy. Then, very mildly: "I sometimes wonder if friendship between two people of different sexes isn't a little dangerous. Even when they're married—*more* dangerous then, maybe."

"For heaven's sake, why?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'm no analyst of the inside workings of men and women. But there seems to be a sort of law, my dear Maurice, that there's got to be a certain degree of uncertainty in all the relationships between man and woman. That there must never be complete understanding—not on both sides at the same time, at any rate."

Maurice stopped and slapped his friend on the back, and started to guffaw.

"That's good!—hear old Simmy giving dope on—" Then he paused and looked reflective. "At that," he began, "there might be—"

He broke off again, and strode along silent, still with that reflective expression. Simmy's big spectacles revealed nothing beyond an owlish glimmer, but he, too, seemed now to walk more buoy-

antly. It was good to hear that outright laugh from his dejected friend; and, then, this air of arrested, sobered attention, as of one thinking. . . .

BUT when Maurice spoke again it was on an entirely different tack. "Say, Simmy—about that play of mine. That big idea—it's really big—"

"Yes?"

"I can't let it just stew around in my system much longer—it'll simmer itself to nothing. It's already gone almost to nothing. And New York—all this damned confusion—"

"Yes?"

"Well, let's cut loose before long. Just you and I. Soon as we can—have to stand the racket a while longer, of course. But late spring or early summer. Bolt off somewhere. Six weeks or two months. What d'you say?"

"Fine!" said Simmy heartily.

"We'll rough it. Camp out—shoot and fish. But I'll work, too. Whenever the fit comes on. Feel somehow it will come on!"

"All you need," said Simmy, "is a chance to pull yourself together. A few weeks of the open air and sleep and quiet will get you out of this."

"Oh, I haven't got into so much, I guess. Just let myself go—a bit tired and nervous; that's all. If I pulled a little melodrama stuff a while ago—"

Simmy made no comment on the apologetic hiatus. He merely said: "I've heard of a place in Maine. Or maybe Canada—"

"I leave all that to you," said Maurice. "All I want is a place where I could forget there's another human in the world. I'm sick of people."

Then, not five minutes later, as they neared the hotel, he was saying:

"Say—about Joan—"

"What about her?" asked Simmy.

"I wonder—I'd like to see her. Just a little talk. I've always felt very kindly toward Joan. D'you think she'd mind if I looked her up?"

"She spoke of you in a quite friendly way."

"What did she say?"

"I don't recall exactly—it's hard to recall exact words."

"But she seemed friendly, eh? Well, she's not the kind to bear malice. Think I'll just write a little note when I go in."

"I'm not sure she's still here; said she might be leaving today."

But Maurice, inquiring at the desk, learned that Joan had not yet checked out. He went at once to the writing-room.

"I do not know," he wrote, "that it will please you to hear from me. If it displeases you just tear up my note. For my own part I'd like very much to see you. Our marriage was a mistake, but one can forget much in six years—I hope you have forgotten much—and I see no reason why we couldn't have a little chat as any two friends might meet and chat. I know it will be my deserts if you refuse—but I'll be hoping you won't disappoint me."

IV

HE sent the note directly to her room by a boy. By dinner-time he had received no answer. In the dining-room he chose a chair facing the door, and his eyes kept restlessly glancing that way. Simmy was seated with his back to the door but, by the quickening in Maurice's eyes, he knew when Joan entered. But there was no bow, no show of recognition—not up to the time coffee was finished.

As the party of three left the room Simmy swiftly noted that, in a far corner, Joan was dining in gentle self-absorption. But his swift glance told him she was dressed with more care than the night before. He dexterously piloted a somewhat reluctant Lorraine to the gorgeous fastnesses of the Pompeian room, leaving Maurice, for a space, free in the lobby.

When Joan emerged from the watched doorway Maurice walked straight up to her. He was surprised to find his knees were not steady. She chanced to be wearing a dress of soft cloudy blue—his favorite color.

"Joan!"

"Yes, Maurice?"

They shook hands.

"Did you get my note?"

"Yes—I was going to answer it presently."

"This is a nicer kind of answer!" laughing down at her. "That is, if you were going to let me see you."

"Why, yes. I thought, just as you did, a little visit would be pleasant. You're looking well, Maurice," though, privately, she thought he didn't.

"And you, Joan!—you look exactly as I've remembered you. You've no idea, Joan, how often I've thought about you!"

Her eyes laughed reproval.

"You didn't use to tell me falsehoods, Maurice—even pretty ones."

"That's no falsehood!" Then, glancing round impatiently: "Where can we go?—this isn't a place to talk. If you will talk to me—? But perhaps you're —"

She shook her head. "No, I'm alone and a little lonesome."

She guided him to the quiet spot she and Simmy had found the night before.

Resting back in a big wicker chair and gazing out at the moonlit sea, Maurice gave a deep sigh of contentment. He turned on her a quizzical smile.

"It's almost like—" he began.

"Our honeymoon—yes," smiling back.

"Funny—that we should meet again, the first time, where we spent our honeymoon!"

"Let's not spoil our meeting by recalling memories, Maurice."

"Would all the memories be distasteful?"

She turned her head away. "Let's not try to be sentimental," she murmured—"that would be rather absurd."

"I suppose so," looking a little crestfallen. "Nevertheless I have some beautiful memories."

"The past is always beautiful. Even the harsher memories get softened by time."

"Joan, don't be cruel!"

"I'm not cruel. Only sensible. The penalty of oncoming age, I suppose," and she gave a little laugh. "In youth

one's romantic—and dreams. Then later one wakes up—and is sensible."

"Then romance is all done for you, eh?"

She gazed out at the moonlit sea while he gazed at her profile.

"I don't know," she said slowly. "No woman likes to give up romance utterly. And I'm a woman." She paused; he didn't speak, and she went on: "Women always seem to be waiting for something, full of longings and expectations. *Something*—vague, but which they hope some day will come."

"And has it come to you—since I stopped blotting the horizon?" trying to speak lightly. "Have you found romance—love?"

She shook her head. "I haven't explored much."

"Then why?" he asked curiously—and with a deeper note than mere curiosity. "What has held you back? You've been free."

She looked at him candidly, smilingly.

"I told you I'd got sensible. All women are incurably romantic but it's the lucky one who finds a leaven of good practical commonsense. It keeps one from doing silly things—from longing too much for impossible things."

"D'you know," he said, "you hurt a little, Joan. You've changed—and I feel that perhaps I—"

"Of course I've changed," she interrupted. "But please don't charge it against your conscience—that would hurt me. People are bound to change."

"I behaved like a skunk to you!"

She half-lifted a protesting hand, but he rushed on:

"I did! If only I'd just met you now—if I'd just been presented, we'd have a chance to become great friends."

"I hope we are friends," she said gently.

"Of course. But if I had a chance to wipe out the ugly impressions I've left on you—if I could start brand new —"

He hesitated, and she didn't speak; he was silent a moment, seeming a little at a loss.

"Well, one thing's certain," he said at length. "Even if things did turn out wrong—due to my rotten performance—it still stands that no two people ever understood each other better than we did. Didn't we?"

"Perhaps."

"Aren't you sure? Why, Joan, I've never known anyone whose comprehension I could rely on so completely. Of course I abused it—but no use going into that again. But the fact remains I never felt driven to keeping anything secret from you. There were never any secrets between us."

"Secrets?" she echoed.

"Yes."

"I don't know—I'm not so sure, Maurice, that there weren't little secrets. A secret place, rather, that I kept just to myself."

"Why, Joan, what do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing very startling," with a smile. "I fancy any woman, every woman, would admit as much were she telling the exact truth. There's a little verse—

I will not give thee all my heart
For that I need a place apart
To dream my dreams in, and I know
Few sheltered ways for dreams to go.

That's not so wicked, is it, Maurice?—women need that little 'place apart.'"

"And never show it to any man?"

"Never to any man."

FOR A MOMENT they both stared out at the shimmering water. Distant strains from the dance orchestra floated in to them. Then she turned to him with the remembered cornerwise smile, droll and sweet.

"How did we drift into all this? We were not going to be reminiscent or . . . Tell me something of your work; what you're doing and all you're going to do!"

Well, there was a lot to talk about; and Maurice had forgotten almost—how easy it was to talk to Joan of his work, his plans, his hopes. Soon he was telling her of his Big Idea—a really worthwhile thing it would be if he could pull

it off. He was tentatively calling it "The Highroad"—or, perhaps, "The By-Path." It centered round a man; an ambitious man who resolutely and daringly forged ahead on the main highway of life and adventure and success. If he found himself deflecting on to some by-path, he would quickly scramble back to the main road again. Only to find in the end, after he'd won his full success, that somehow he had missed happiness—had forfeited it back somewhere along one of those wayside paths. It would seem he had everything life could offer him—yet he had nothing. For him the real highroad had been that ignored little side-trail—there had lain his real quest; and it was too late—the path was left behind, lost. . . .

Joan nodded approvingly. She was thinking of the *naïveté* of artists, which makes it possible for them to expose their secret souls without self-consciousness—without even the thought of possible detection. She would have liked to reach out and rumple Maurice's hair, as if he were a little boy; but all she did was to nod approval, and say:

"Yes, you can make something out of that."

"I thought once I could," Maurice said a little bitterly. "But it keeps slipping out of my grasp—just when I think I've got it. It's this darn life. Simmy and I are thinking of slipping away before long, to the Maine woods or somewhere—maybe I can get a real whack at it."

"I'm sure you can. The Maine woods—that sounds alluring."

"Yes. Do you remember that summer—"

He broke off; then, suddenly: "Joan, I wish you could go along! With just Simmy and me!"

She laughed merrily.

"That would be a sensation. I'm behind the times with Broadway customs—but for a man and his divorced wife—well, really, Maurice—"

He looked at her, half-reproachful and himself half-amused,

"I wasn't thinking of conventions or—circumstances. I was just thinking of

how jolly it would be to have you along. It *would* be jolly. Don't you remember—"

"I remember we've been here a long time and that your friends are probably wondering where you are," she rose. "It's been awfully nice to see you again, Maurice—"

"Then tell me when I can see you again." He was reaching for her hand. "Couldn't we slip off somewhere for lunch tomorrow? I know a—"

"I may bolt back to town tomorrow. I've been getting a little bored; you see I'm just over the flu, I'm a convalescent—"

"You've been ill?—and sitting in these draughts without a wrap! You shouldn't be so careless—you might get pneumonia!"

She laughed. "Don't scold me like that—you make me feel as though we were married."

He caught her hand.

"Don't spoil my sense of freedom," she added.

"Well, about tomorrow—tell me you're not running off," he pleaded.

She hesitated. He was still holding her hand.

"I know a delightful little place," he urged. "We could motor there inside an hour. There are 'so many things I haven't had a chance to say. Say you'll come!"

"Well, you might phone me in the morning," she suggested.

UP IN HER ROOM, Joan regarded her reflection in the mirror with a curious half-smiling gaze. Tenderness, pain and ironic amusement were blended in that enigmatic smile—but the tenderness was preponderant. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes, very soft and bright, held something deeper than tenderness.

Finally, "How absurd!" she said; but the expression in those eyes did not change.

Meanwhile Maurice had found his friends. Simmy had been having a bad session with the lovely Lorraine, who had turned sulky; but he held no rancor against Maurice when he saw the look on his young chief's face.



One Said

By Elizabeth Shaw Montgomery

ONE said: "I have built for you a shrine
And hourly I kneel, scourging myself with whips;
My hands would be sacrilege on chalice wine,"
But I craved his lips.

Another said: "You are a woman, and lo,
You are fashioned for love, you are fragrant as jessamine;
You shall dwell in the curve of my arm, forever so—"
Then I prayed for the shrine.



GREAT SCENE: the point in a play where the audience coughs loudest.



The blasé New York man-about-town makes a note in his diary . . .

An Evening OUT

By Charles G. Shaw

NO, it's not precisely the collar you want, but it's the only one with square tabs, and, besides, it's getting late. It will have to do. A tightly knotted tie is hurriedly accomplished and, snatching a handful of silver and a bunch of keys from the dressing table, you climb into your blue overcoat, grab your silk hat, and rush to the elevator that has passed your floor and loiters leisurely on its downward course. Five minutes later you are in a taxi, being borne uptownward. . . .

Damn! You suddenly discover that you have forgotten your flask. An unforgivable piece of carelessness! Surely something on the hip is never a mistake. However, that last highball certainly hit the right spot and, as you gaze from the window of the cab into the cloudless, velvet sky, you cannot help feeling like plucking a star and slipping it into your button-hole. There is a touch of frolic in the very breeze.

Three or four puffs at a cigarette, and the taxi draws up at the curb, before a brownstone house. There is a footman somewhere in the offing, and you tell the driver, somewhat unnecessarily loudly, to "keep the change" as the heavy glass doors, set in grilled iron frames, swing majestically open. In a little red room, on the right, attended by two solemn-faced menials, you deposit your hat and overcoat, and proceed up the winding, marble stairway.

PANELS of fruit and dancing nymphs decorate the walls and, at the top, your hostess, Mrs. Clayton Barrowsmythe, a tall, willowy blonde in

a pale mauve arrangement, greets you with a faded smile and the remark that "everyone is so punctual, nowadays." Her tired business husband extends a flabby hand, and you grin inanely, hoping that the cocktails will arrive soon.

Over on the gold and scarlet brocade sofa—an Empire reproduction from the Maison Glückstein—are Maude Claffburridge and a pallid youth. They are discussing the latest supper restaurant, and ask if you were at the Tatterleys' dance on Friday. The other guests include the Gordon Willistons, Bertie Clegg, the Inwaite girls, and a sandy-haired, middle-aged man with just the suggestion of a chin.

Florence Inwaite has recently returned from Paris, where, for the past year, she has been endeavoring to forget all the French taught her at Miss Rutter's Finishing School for Young Ladies. A brief and somewhat disconnected conversation, in which you engage with her, discloses the following facts: (1) that there are a great many Americans going abroad, (2) that the "left bank" is so Bohemian, (3) that France is such a picturesque country, and (4) that everyone in America thinks only of making money. A sombre servant, bearing a silver tray of pale pink cocktails and anchovy patés, embellished with grated egg, then enters, and you eagerly toss off the libation and begin nibbling at a paté.

In the meanwhile, George Barnesleigh, a harmless young stock-broker, has appeared upon the scene, and the party is, at length, complete. Stifling a sigh of relief, Mrs. Barrowsmythe

gives a nervous little laugh and mutters something about going in to dinner. Slowly the procession files into the dining-room.



AFTER a tour of twice around the table, you discover that you are seated between Ellen Williston and the other Inwaite sister—Matilda. Both are extremely sweet, gentle, demure, and wholly uninteresting young women. However, there is Bristol Cream sherry and Chateau-Latour '12. A vapid conversation with Ellen, touching upon the current traffic congestion, accompanies the oysters on the half shell and, during the *crème Dubarry*, you attempt a feeble analysis of the popularity of Mah-Jong, while Barnesleigh, across the table, talks Wall Street to the anaemic youth next to Maude Claffburridge.

With the arrival of the fish course—an elaborately garnished flounder in a white wine sauce—you turn your attention to little Matilda Inwaite, who readily agrees with whatever you may say in the most enthusiastic manner. The more preposterous your statements, the more rhapsodic she waxes. Barrowsmythe, throughout the repast, gazes forlornly into space.

There is chatter embracing varied topics—houseboating, divorce, one-piece bathing-suits, shingled hair, lawn tennis, bootlegging, gift-shops, concert singing, the weather, Russian dancing. . . . And with the roast duck there is a sprinkling of Pomery. . . .

"Don't you adore picnics!" gushes Ellen Williston. "I think they're so amusing and rustic. Especially if they're *really* in the country."

On and, on the babble flows and you find yourself draining your goblet to the bottommost dregs. It certainly tastes like the real thing, though the label on the bottle *did* look a trifle suspicious.

The salad is of the fruit variety with a spicy French dressing, and is

followed by a gelatinous, rose-tinted blanc mange. At this point, the stock-broker, opposite, has completely run out of conversation and is pretending to listen to the platitudes of his hostess, on whose immediate left he is stationed.

"It strikes me," she is saying, "that politics have become dreadfully corrupt. I don't see why someone doesn't do something about it. It's really an outrage!" To which assertion the young man nods a languid assent and polishes off his Scotch highball.



THE heavily chased platters containing grapes, pears, peaches and raisins remain untouched, and, at a signal from Mrs. Barrowsmythe, everyone rises, the ladies swishing out of the room in a flurry of silk, and the gentlemen re-seating themselves in a group at one end of the table. After a few minutes of somewhat awkward silence, the host commences a dissertation on foreign exchange and you turn to Gordon Williston for a light for your *Rosa del Mundo*.

"Have you heard the one about the three old maids?" he inquires, and before you are unable to tell him that you alone are responsible for its present popularity, he has launched forth into a highly ornate and detailed version of the anecdote. The fluctuation of the franc is almost immediately unheeded and all hands are soon eagerly listening to Williston's tale. Its termination is greeted with a salvo of throaty chuckles, and Barnesleigh is at once reminded of a story dealing with a negro porter and a honeymoon couple, which he thereupon proceeds to unfold, while the pallid youth, rather hesitatingly, recites a limerick in which a young girl from Duluth is the leading character. You down your third *crème de menthe* and spring the conundrum about the elephant and the monkey.

"Suppose we ought to be joining the girls," pipes up Barrowsmythe, after a hearty swig of benedictine,

and rises to his feet. The others follow amid murmurs of agreement.

3

IN the drawing-room you find yourself next to Maude Claffburridge, who beamingly announces that she would so much rather listen to scandal during lunch than the best orchestra in the world, and Florence Inwaite wants to know why she never sees you any more at the Gillespies'. Bertie Clegg informs you he is sailing Tuesday on the *Mauretania*.

"I'm afraid we'll be late for the play," Mrs. Barrowsmythe remarks, "it's almost nine o'clock." Whereupon the ladies disappear upstairs to prink and Barrowsmythe inquires if you wish to inspect the library.

Outside, the family limousine and a couple of taxis (ordered from the club) are drawn up before the house, and there is a lengthy discussion as to who will accompany whom. Nestled between your hostess and Ellen Williston, you ultimately depart in the limousine.

"I do hope Clayton hasn't forgotten the tickets," murmurs the blonde lady, as the car swerves around the corner. "He doesn't remember anything lately. I think he needs a vacation."

There is a traffic jam a few blocks ahead and by the time the theatre is reached it is nearly half past nine: Barrowsmythe discovers the tickets in his waistcoat, and the party enters 'midst considerable confusion and straggle down the farthest aisle like a herd of lost sheep. George Barnesleigh, who has begun to feel his fourth chartreuse, is talking at the top of his voice.

As six of the seats are in the seventh row and five are in the eighth, matters tend to become still more disrupted, and a certain amount of unsolicited criticism of the proceedings is tendered by several of the more outspoken members of the audience. At length, with a sigh of resignation, you drop into G-11,

between Maude and one of the Inwaite girls, just as the curtain falls on the first act. . . .

"I think it's about a man who lived somewhere in the Middle West and married a girl who wanted to paint," declares Florence Inwaite, "Harry Clanderson said he saw it last Monday."

"Maybe it tells something about the plot in the programme," suggests Maude, "only we haven't any programmes."

Of course, you instantly volunteer to fetch some, and again knee your way through an angry row of scowls. In the foyer you discover two programmes, and Barnesleigh, who has been unable to locate his seat and wishes to know where he can get a drink. You tell him there's a place across the street that sells the stuff, and vanish in the direction of the smoking-room. A few nervous puffs and, once more, you stalk down the aisle, a target of ungracious comment.

Breathlessly, the young ladies scan the programmes. "You see," says Florence, "the first act was in Philadelphia. I told you it's about the Middle West. And the next act is Ruth Jordan's studio in Brooklyn. Ruth must be the girl he marries."

"You mean the girl who marries the painter?" innocently asks Miss Claffburridge, but before there is time to explain, the lights are lowered and the curtain rises, oh! so slowly.

With a semi-repressed groan, you suddenly realize the worst. On no less than four occasions previously you have witnessed the play that is being projected before you! Furthermore, on each occasion, you sincerely believed it to be the most thoroughly uninteresting piece of drivel you had ever had the misfortune to sit through. And now you have been dragged to it again! Surely there must be some limit to human endurance.

However, there is nothing to do

but suffer in silence. An escape is out of the question. You are caught, as in a trap.

During the third act you begin to hope that the theatre will catch afire, and you wonder which exit you should choose. But no such event takes place, and the dullness of the dialogue is interrupted only by the occasional observations of Mrs. Barrowsmythe to the effect that the girl in the left-hand stage box is a dead ringer for Julie Listerplane. There is a great amount of coughing and clearing of throats and, as your wrist-watch with the luminous hands indicates the time to be ten minutes past eleven, the curtain descends.

"Wasn't it too marvelous!" ejaculates Ellen Williston, "I thought it was so true to life." And Matilda Inwaite vows that she "adored every bit of it—particularly the part where the husband tells Ruth that he has never loved anyone else."

"It reminds me of something I once saw in Vienna," comments the pallid young man.

On all sides are jostling, elbowing crowds, and it is a considerable time before the lobby is finally reached. After much fumbling in his coat pockets, Barrowsmythe produces the check for the car.

"I think the Frou Frou is the best place for supper," announces the hostess. "They have such nice looking waiters there."

"Oh, I love the Frou Frou!" Maude gushes, and both the Inwaite girls immediately shriek their praises for the same resort.

Visions of clatter, crash, and crush arise before you, and an empty, sinking sensation grips you within. Visions of jangle, racket, and din. You have had quite enough of such discomfort for one evening, and the very thought of being buffeted about a dance floor, vainly attempting to attract a waiter, packed in like a sardine, is more than you intend to put up with. Decidedly the Frou

Frou is not your notion. You will die first. Still, you realize, excuses—however reasonable—are of not the slightest avail. No plea or argument is sufficient to convince a hostess. "You *must* come for just a while," they invariably insist, and once you give in, you're lost! No, something else must be done. And quickly, too. There is no time to dally.

"I think I see the motor, now," says dear Mrs. Barrowsmythe, mistaking a wholly different vehicle for her own car. "And, by the way," she adds, "we'll need another taxi."

Here is your golden opportunity! At last your chance has come.

"I'll get one in no time," you tell her. "I'll pick up a cab on the corner." And off you glide into the nebulous night. There is magic in the air and a sudden gladness overcomes you. What a joy it is to be free again! What a blessing! Across the street you duck into the first door that catches your eye—oddly enough, the entrance to a saloon, or rather, what was once a saloon—a saloon of the faded past. Still, nothing appears to be greatly changed since the dear, departed days. Indeed, it seems quite as crowded as it ever was.

ON the left of the long, low room are tables and chairs and, at the rear, a game of poker is in progress. The air is thick with tobacco smoke. Shouts of laughter greet your ears—shouts and cries of carousal. Surely some sort of jollity being staged, you decide. And it begins to look like a lively evening. Then, without the least warning, the cause of the merry-making appears—in the shape of George Barnesleigh who, in a booth at the back, surrounded by a gleeful, besweated, unshaven group of taxi-drivers, prize fighters, and expolicemen is vociferously celebrating! Why, of course, you'll join them! Delighted to! By all means! Glad to see him again. Yes, a highball—a Scotch highball—is just what you want.

Something happens to the world every spring. . . Something rich and beautiful and elemental. It even creeps up the crowded aisles of the Five-and-ten and fills the hearts of girls and boys at work there with happiness and wonder.

Here is the story of black-haired Myra and blue-eyed Denny—and the funny twist that Fate gave their lives just after the Spring started to play its old, old game. It's an every-day sort of story—it might happen to any of us!

A Kiss in the Dark

By Nan O'Reilly

IT WAS SPRING, a Spring so soft, so insinuating, that it had wormed its way into the city's dingiest spots and they had burgeoned forth almost overnight into a swift, fugitive beauty. Even Cooper's Five-and-Ten felt a surge of gaiety. The ribbon counter grew riotous with bolts of apple green and oriole orange, while Number 18, millinery, blossomed miraculously into a garden of exotic flowers, the rarest of which could be purchased for a humble dime.

Back in the music department, where little sloe-eyed, bobbed-haired Myra Simon beat out her tireless rhythms, there was an added heaviness in the atmosphere. Nevertheless, Myra thumped "I'm Coo Coo Over You" with fresh gusto, her lithe young body swaying sinuously under its revealing jersey dress as her agile fingers flashed up and down the keys.

"Gee, I feel great," she flung back over her shoulder to Dennis Coughlin, who was languidly handing copies of the piece over the counter. "What's eatin' you, Denny? Why ain't you singin'?"

There was no answering twinkle in Denny's Irish eyes.

"Don't feel like it," he answered briefly as he pushed the cash register behind her. "No, lady, we're all out of 'Lingering.' Yes, that's the song that's bein' played—I'm Coo Coo Over You—latest hit."

He moved up and down in the narrow space back of the counter, flinging copies with long, somewhat grimy fingers into the outstretched hands waiting for them. "I'm Coo Coo Over You," he droned up and down until he came within earshot of the girl again. "God, but I'm sick of this place," he muttered.

Myra threw a startled glance up at his glowering face, while her fingers kept up their mechanical tum tum. Then she grinned.

"Aw, you've got the spring fever, Denny. Get your mother to give you sulphur and molasses." Her playing swept to a close and for a moment there was a lull in the demands on them.

"Naw, I wanna change. I'm sick of singin' this stuff." His arm swept the racks filled with gaudy colored sheets of music. "I want—"

A timid voice at Myra's elbow made her turn reluctantly.

Next to the counter, a piece of music fluttering in her hand, was a timid,

mouselike woman wearing a deprecatory smile.

"Would he sing this?" she begged. "I think I'd like to buy it."

Myra took the sheet with bored superiority and turned to the boy.

"Gee, it's an awful chestnut—'Just a Kiss in the Dark.' Shall I tell her you got pneumonia?"

Perversely Denny shook his head.

"It's not as bad as the rest of 'em. It's kinda sweet. Let 'er go."

The girl spread the piece on the rack before her and permitted her broad-tipped fingers to sweep idly over the keys. Then Denny sang.

The pushing, jostling throng in front of the music department came to a sudden, almost hypnotized silence. People with other people's elbows digging into them remained in open-mouthed quiet, oblivious of their discomfort as the liquid, golden notes filled the air.

"'Just a Kiss in the Dark.'"

Something warm and suffocating was pressing down upon Myra. Waves of hot blood seemed washing over her body, leaving her languid and almost unconscious of the place where she sat. Denny! Her fingers picked out the notes unerringly, but she played sensuously, unlike herself. She twisted around until she could watch him. His eyes were half closed and his head on its thick young neck was thrown back. She could see the tips of his strong white teeth as the full, flexible lips rounded and drew back and played around the words.

"'Just a Kiss in the Dark.'"

To be kissed by Denny. All at once it seemed to Myra the most desirable thing in the world—the one desirable thing—to feel herself caught in those wiry arms and held close. She wanted him to stop singing. She felt as if she could bear no more of that flood of sound. She wanted him to look at her, to see her as she was seeing him. He was coming up behind her to look over her shoulder at the last lines of the song, and his hand fell on her arm. Its warmth on her flesh made a chill go through her, so that he felt her tremble,

and as the last notes floated away he looked down into her upraised eyes.

THE CROWD, with a mighty sigh, as if released from a spell, melted away and they were alone for a moment, looking at each other.

"How about goin' up to the Aud tonight?" he asked quickly. "Great music. The Pixie Six play there every Friday night."

Myra turned away.

"That'd be swell," she murmured. Then she laughed shrilly. "Gee, I love to dance."

At the first notes of Denny's song two men on their way from the office stopped suddenly, arrested by the wonder of the boy's voice. The shorter of the two, a swarthy-faced Italian, grew obviously excited as the song drew to a close.

"Cooper, I'm going to talk to that boy. I've never made a mistake in a voice yet," he exclaimed starting toward Number 18.

Cooper, king of the five-and-ten realm, put out a restraining hand. He was thin and nervous-mannered, with a slit-like mouth that reminded one forcibly of a slot machine. One could almost see the nickels and dimes being snapped up and transmuted in the course of a few years into luxuries such as the thin platinum watch he now drew from his waistcoat.

"Five-thirty now. Three-quarters of an hour to get home—then dress and be back again by seven-thirty to meet that crowd of Maisie's. I know my wife and I know you impresarios. She won't like it if we're late, and, once you start talking to a find you'll never stop." He began dragging the reluctant Figli toward the door. "Make it tomorrow. I'll see that the boy has word as soon as he gets here to come out to the house. Then you've got the piano, the setting, the leisure. By the time you're out of bed, he'll be there. He's not going to run away over night."

Figli pulled a wry face.

"You millionaires! You think that Art, she can wait for everything—even

a party of stupid women." He threw up his quick hands. "Such a voice, and singing cheap little songs! He could be a second McCormack, only perhaps greater." His eyes lighted enthusiastically. "Never have I heard anything like that upper register, so light so sweet, like a night wind."

"Yes, but Maisie won't be so sweet or so light on us when we're an hour late," Cooper retorted practically. "Where's that damn Oscar? Ah, there he is. Home, and make it snappy."

II

MYRA had a new dress to wear to the Aud that night. Those broad-tipped fingers could do more than play, and out of four yards of yellow voile at fifty-nine cents a yard she had fashioned a slim, smart little frock that made her olive skin glow like golden fruit in the yellow light and made her black hair shine like polished ebony.

Whistling appreciatively, Denny whirled her about the Aud.

"Holy Saint Patrick, Myra, but I never knew you was so pretty. What do you look like? A gypsy?"

Myra laughed impishly.

"Were there any gypsy Jews, Denny? If there was, mebbe I'm one."

Denny grinned down at her delightedly.

"Look at all the fellows givin' you the once over. They all want to know where I got the swell dame I'm takin' out. I'll knock 'em down if they try cuttin' in."

Drawing closer in the circle of his arm, Myra breathed:

"Don't let them, Denny. No one could dance as well as you."

NO ONE could. The two swept the floor in perfect unison, the man's broad shoulders towering over the little, yellow-clad figure that floated after him like a dancing leaf.

The girl felt unreal. Something elemental seemed to have been released in her and she only wanted to go on and on close to that great chest where she

could hear the heart pounding strongly, and see Denny's flushed face bent over her.

Then suddenly she wanted to go.

The music had started one of its few waltzes, and, strangely, it was the piece of the afternoon.

"'Just a Kiss in the Dark,'" hummed Denny. The girl could feel a pulse beating in her throat. She looked up into those dashing, merry eyes. "Just a Kiss in the Dark."

"Let's go, Denny—I'm gettin' awful tired. I guess it must be the heat."

But when they were out in the street she decided to walk home.

"The cars will all be hot and crowded and it's only a few blocks, anyway," she insisted.

The tender young leaves of the trees clung half-frightened to the brown boughs, and the light from the street lamps shining through their lucent greenness made the street gleam strangely, like some cavern under water. Myra's steps were noiseless, and the softened light on her little face took away its hardness and clothed it for the moment with mystery and allurements.

They went on without speaking until they reached her house. They were on the porch and her hand was in his.

"Gee, it's been great, Denny." Her breath caught a little. "I had a swell time."

Her great dark eyes were unfathomable in the shadows.

The boy bent his head and his casual lips met hers. But something burned up from her and he caught her suddenly in a fierce grip. Her body grew limp in his clasp while those full, flexible lips pressed down on hers until she felt that they were draining all the blood from her body.

"You're awful sweet tonight, Myra," he murmured at last.

"Aw, go on," she whispered breathlessly, "I'm just as sweet every night."

"Will you be as sweet to me every night?" he questioned. "How about goin' to the Palace tomorrow night?"

"It'd be great," she panted, "but I gotta go now," and, with a swift twist,

she was out of his arms and through the open door.

III

MYRA was late for work the next morning. For hours she had lain awake as the music throbbed in her brain and the memory of that fierce young kiss tingled within her.

Every little while she would drowse off to dream that Denny was saying,

"You're awful sweet tonight, Myra," and then she would waken deliciously to the knowledge that they were going to the Palace that night.

She almost ran down to the store. The air was warm with promise. Ten minutes more—five minutes more and she would see him.

As she dashed in, she pulled off her hat and coat and ran a hand over her sleek cap of hair while she made a hurried way to the music department. . . .

No Denny. She smiled secretly to herself. Denny late, too. Perhaps he had been awake half the night. That was nice, if he had lain sleepless thinking of her.

Taking out her duster, she began swishing it over the racks. The minutes dragged on and she grew anxious. Ten o'clock—heavens! Denny could never be so late. Something must have happened. Her face grew worried as she peered down the filling aisles. Ten-thirty!

Across the aisle moon-faced Sarah Borkowski grinned at her.

"Lookin' for Denny?" she inquired superfluously. "Hear you were at the Aud last night."

"Any of your business?" Myra retorted tartly. "I didn't see you dancin' your feet off."

The little Pole ignored the implication.

"Well, he beat you to it this morning. He's come and gone."

Myra's face grew blank.

"Come and gone—whatcha mean?"

"Oh, didn't you know?" the other girl asked with raised eyebrows. "There was a message waitin' for him in the

office to come right out to the boss's as soon as he got here."

Myra sat down weakly on the piano stool. Discharged—because he hadn't been singing enough, perhaps. But he wouldn't have to go out to the Cooper palace to be discharged. What could it be?

Her eyes moved restlessly about. There was his overcoat—he must have gone off in a rush or all excited. Who wouldn't, summoned to the boss's?

SHE turned blindly to the piano. It was still fairly early for the music department's business, but a few customers were drifting in, and pieces were being thrust at her. Her hands wandered mechanically over the keys, and then she heard a rush of feet down the aisle, and Denny was upon her.

"Myra!" He grasped her by the arm with a grip that hurt, and she noticed that the rich color had faded from his face and that his eyes were dark and dilated with excitement. "I—I'm goin' away!"

The girl felt suddenly limp.

"Where, Denny?" she managed to say finally.

"To Italy—to study. I—There's a fellow out at Cooper's who's a voice expert. He heard me singin' here yesterday. Funny—that old 'Kiss in the Dark.'" The boy stared around the little familiar space, a dazed look in his eyes. "He's sendin' me away to study—says I'll be great."

"Sendin' you away," she repeated after him.

"Takin' me, I mean. We're sailin' tomorrow mornin'."

Myra stood away from him sharply. "Whatcha come back for now?"

His dark, bewildered eyes moved uncertainly about.

"Good-bye, Myra. Got to meet him at twelve. He's buyin' me some clothes."

Suddenly he laughed, a wild, ringing laugh that turned people's faces toward him.

"Knew I came back for something. I darn near forgot my overcoat."

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and get on the job. Work up a sweat and chase those disease bugs out of you. Gee, but they're happy with the chance you're giving them. Are you going to loaf around and let them eat up all your pep? Snap out of it, fellows.

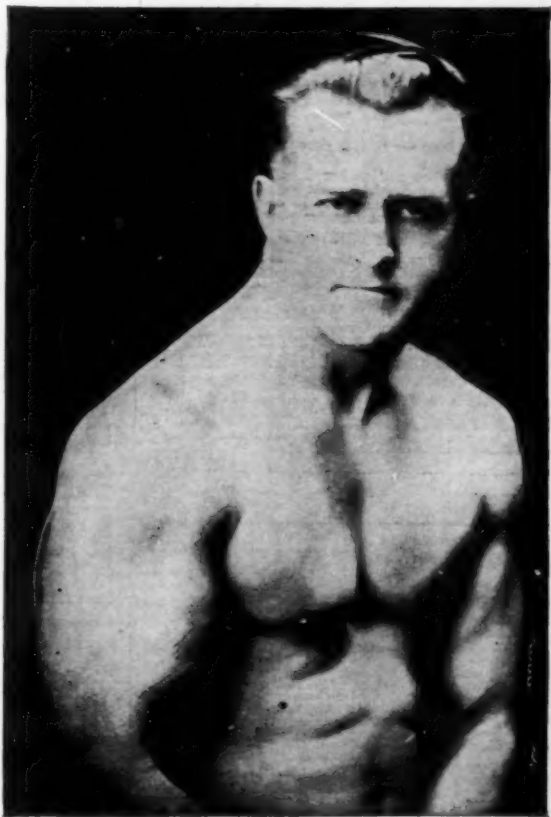
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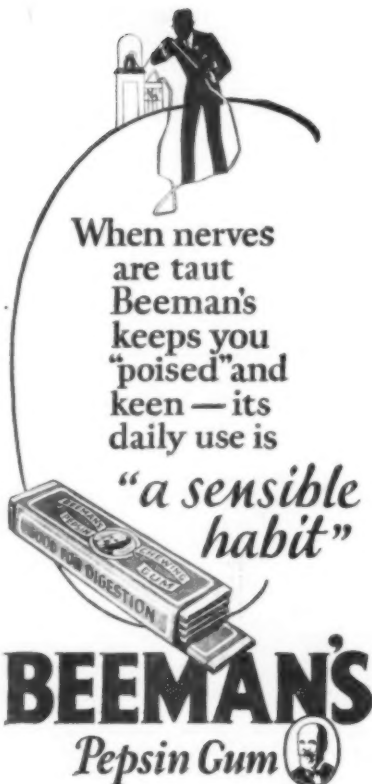
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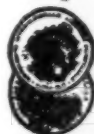
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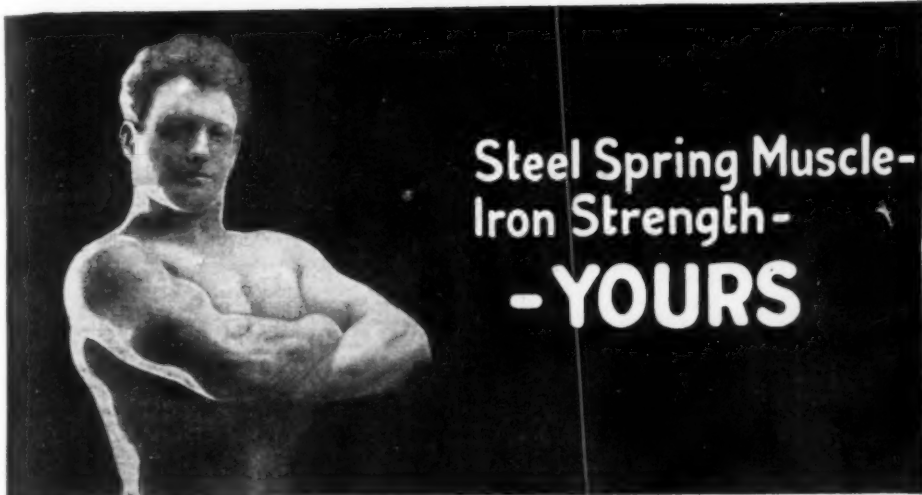
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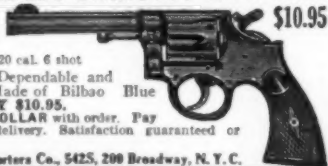
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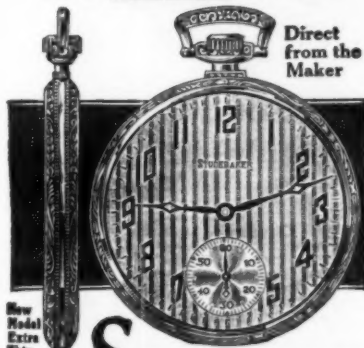
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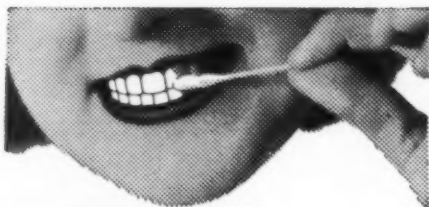
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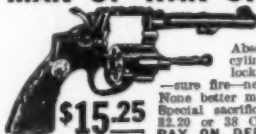
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Finding "The Fountain of Youth"

Along-Sought Secret, Vital to Happiness, Has Been Discovered.

By Walter S. Dean

*Alas! that spring should vanish with the rose!
That youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!*

—OMAR KHAYYAM.

A SECRET vital to human happiness has been discovered. An answer to an ancient problem which, sooner or later, affects the welfare of virtually every man and woman. As this problem undoubtedly will come to you eventually, if it has not come already, I urge you to read this article carefully. It may give you information of a value beyond all price.

This newly-revealed secret is not a new "philosophy" nor a financial formula. It is not a political panacea. It has to do with something of far greater moment to the individual—human happiness, especially in the later years of life. And there is nothing theoretical, imaginative or fantastic about it, because it comes from the coldly exact realms of the practical where values must be proved. It "works." And because it does work—most delightfully—it is one of the most important discoveries made in years. Thousands already bless it for having rescued them from disappointment and misery. Millions will rejoice because of it in years to come.

The peculiar value of this discovery is in its virtue for lifting the physical handicaps resulting from the premature waning of the vital forces of life, whether due to overwork, over-worry, sickness or the general over-expenditure of nervous energy in the strenuous living typical of the modern day. True happiness does not depend on wealth, position or fame. Primarily, it is a matter of health. Not the inefficient, "half-alive" condition which ordinarily passes as "health," but the abundant, vibrant, magnetic vitality of superb manhood and womanhood.

Unfortunately, this kind of health is rare. Our civilization, with its wear and tear, rapidly depletes recuperative capacity, and, in a physical sense, old age comes on when life should be at its prime.



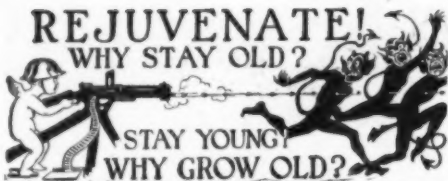
But this is not a tragedy of our era alone. Ages ago a Persian poet, in the world's most melodious epic of pessimism, voiced humanity's immemorial complaint that "spring should vanish with the rose" and the song of summer too soon come to an end. And for centuries before Omar Khayyam wrote his immortal verse, science had searched—and in the centuries that have passed since then has continued to search, without halt, for the fabled "fountain of youth"—the means for renewing energy and extending the summer time of life.

Now, after many years of research, joyful reports from thousands show that lives clouded by the haze of too-early autumn have been illumined by the summer sun of health and joy; old age, in a sense being kept at bay, and the physical and mental vigor of former years again enjoyed in work and recreation. And the discovery which so adds to the joy of living is easily available to every one who feels the need of greater energy and vitality.

The discovery had its origin in famous European laboratories. Brought to America, it was developed into a product that has won the highest praise in thousands of cases, many of which had defied all other treatments. In scientific circles the discovery has been known and used for several years with extraordinarily gratifying appreciation for the success it has demonstrated. It is now put up in convenient tablet form, under the name of Korex compound, for distribution to the general public.

Anyone who finds life losing its charm and color or the feebleness of old age coming on years too soon, can obtain full strength treatment of this compound, sufficient for ordinary cases, under a positive guarantee that it costs nothing if it fails to prove satisfactory and only \$2 if satisfied. In average cases, the compound usually brings about gratifying improvement in a few days.

Simply write in confidence to the Melton Laboratories, 2148 Melton Bldg., Kansas City, Mo., and this wonder restorative will be mailed to you, sealed in a plain wrapper. You may enclose \$2 or, if you prefer, just send your name without money and pay the postman \$2 and postage when the parcel is delivered. In either case, if you report within ten days that you are not satisfied, the purchase price will be refunded on request. The Melton Laboratories are nationally known and thoroughly reliable. Moreover, their offer is fully guaranteed so no one need hesitate to accept it. If you need this widely praised and remarkable rejuvenator, write for it today.



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JUST imagine it! A refined cream that removes hair --- gently and pleasantly, as a true toilet article should. No harshness, no mixing. Nothing to melt. Merely press from the tube and apply as you would a favorite cold cream.

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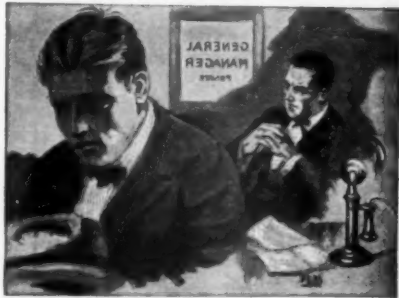
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Is Gray Hair Marking You Old?



She Is Getting Gray



He Is Getting Gray

Nothing Says "I'M OLD" So Quickly As GRAY HAIR

Q-ban Hair Color Restorer Makes Gray Hair **DARK**

LET'S discuss the subject frankly. Gray hair, however attractive, does denote age. Gray hair marks a woman as getting old at the cost of her popularity. Gray hair does, unjustly, make it hard for a man to get or hold a job.

Is gray hair marking you old? Are you allowing gray hair to hold you back in social or business affairs? You know full well you are no older than others who have no gray hair. Has it ever occurred to you that they are concealing a few gray hairs? Hundreds of thousands do!

It is so easy to darken your gray hair—the Q-ban way. Q-ban Hair Color Restorer is not an instantaneous dye; it does its work so gradually that during the first week or so you wonder if it is going to work at all; but the gray disappears, your friends do not notice it, and your handicap of gray hair is gone. It is inexpensive and is easily applied in the privacy of your home. You need not have gray hair any more.

Your Druggist Guarantees Q-ban

Q-ban Hair Color Restorer is covered by the broadest kind of a guarantee. We authorize your druggist to refund your money if you are not entirely satisfied—and you are to be the judge.



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